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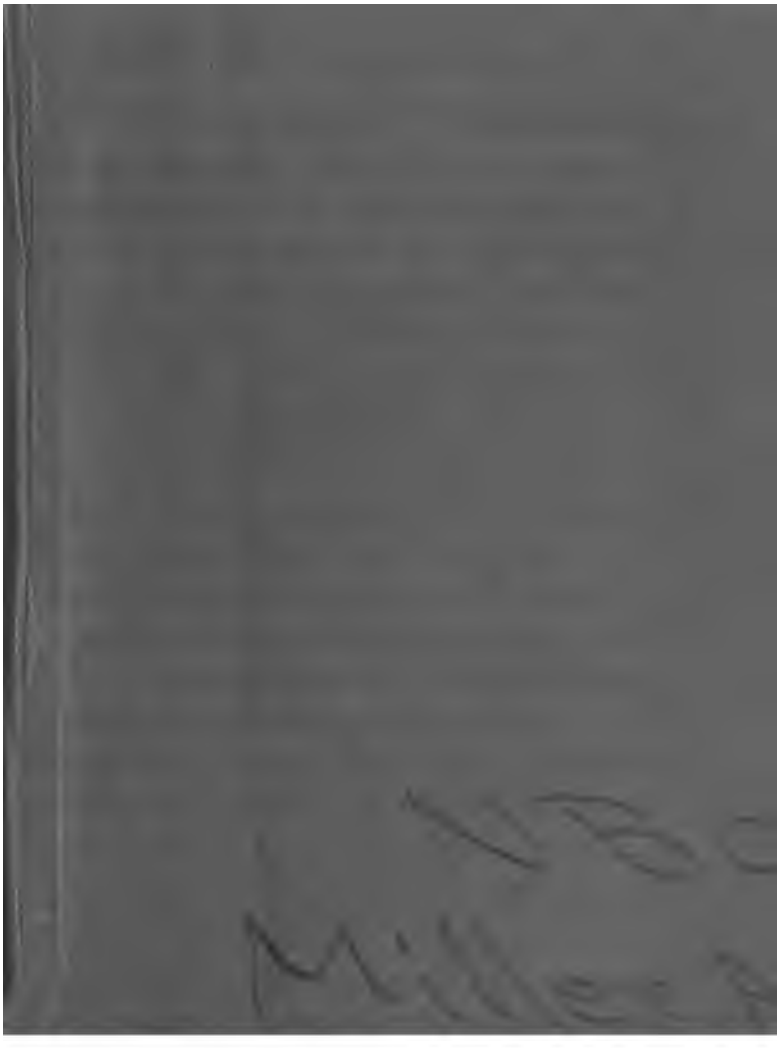

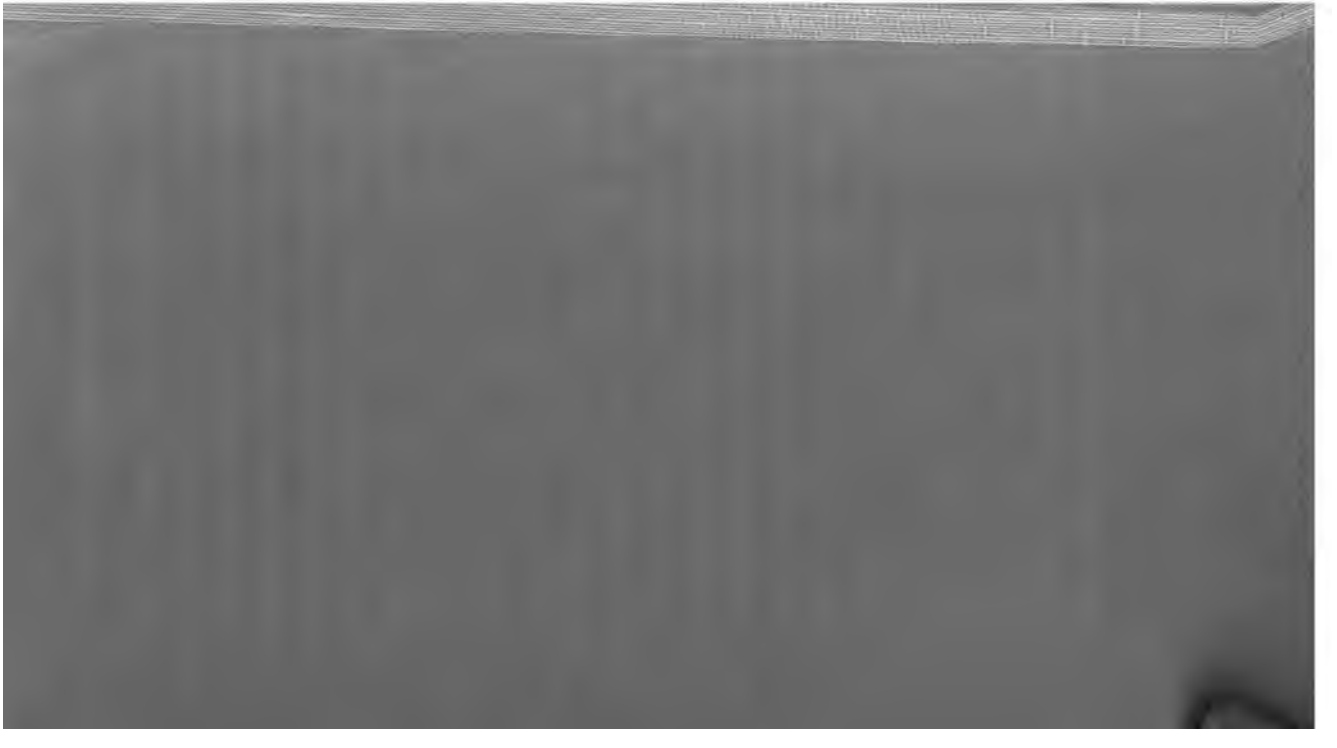

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Q.D.

THE MODERN OBSTACLE

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BY

ALICE DUER MILLER

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THE MODERN OBSTACLE

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PRELUDE

LATE one afternoon in April, a crowded ferry-boat was about to put forth from the cavernous embrace of its pier. Whistles blew, belated passengers ran, bells rang, and the olive-brown water which, a second before, had been so equably swinging up and down on the tarred piles, was first invaded and then effaced by the foam from the paddle-wheels.

On the after deck, where the crowd was less dense, a man and a woman were leaning on the rail, her arm through his. A leather valise stood beside him, but about her, though her dress was inconspicuous to the verge of insolence, there were no signs of an approaching journey.

They had been standing thus for several minutes. Now and then the woman's hand travelled up and down the serge of the man's coat-sleeve with a

gesture that would have flattered the softest satin, but neither spoke.

It was a particularly calm spring evening. The river and harbor were already gray; a gray haze hung over the lower part of the city. Above it the tops of the monstrous buildings reflected enough of the sunset in the western sky to blend dimly with the eastern.

The boat was in mid-stream when the man, raising his head, said:

"I want one thing distinctly understood between us. If I find life unbearable without you, I consider myself at liberty to put an end to it."

The woman made no reply, and after a time he said:

"I hope you told your cab to wait for you."

She nodded.

A few minutes later the boat reached its dock. The other passengers surged forward and left them alone. He too moved, raised his elbows and looked at his companion, but her head remained averted, so that when the moment of his departure was fully come in order to attract her attention he said:

"Pauline."

At this she turned slowly toward him. He took off his hat and, with a restraint that only inexperience could have mistaken for calm, he kissed her.

Immediately after, he picked up his valise and disappeared.

CHAPTER I

TWO ladies had been lunching together one November afternoon, and were now drinking their coffee, in one of the few old-fashioned drawing-rooms that New York has left. Even here the old and the new were strangely mingled; an obviously modern element was present. The mahogany doors in their white wood setting, the heavy bookcases running almost to the ceiling, the blank white marble fireplace were all old; but the books themselves, the pictures on the wall, even the wonderful black-and-gold Japanese fish in a glass globe near the window were wholly of the taste of the hour.

The elder lady was, like her furniture, frankly old. Her hair was white, and few could behold her without feeling that she was exactly what an old lady ought to be. Little beauty remained to her, yet there was in her bearing that sweet confidence that pretty women carry to their graves. An acute observer might have gone so far as to surmise that the spirit and taste with which she took up the rôle

of age was the last expression of the coquetry of her youth.

The other was much younger, was indeed at that uncertain age when a woman has given up being well dressed on her own account, and has not begun it for the satisfaction of her children. Her long face gleamed with an alertness that might have been mistaken for wit had not her frequent and unproportioned smile betrayed her.

"In short, Mrs. Crewe," she was saying, as she inserted two bony forefingers under her bonnet in search of a somewhat niggardly veil, "I never saw a man before whom I thought good enough for Pauline, but he does seem just the right person—young, rich, good-looking—well, nice-looking, an excellent sportsman, religious, and not more flirtatious than he ought to be. Of course I have mentioned her to him, in general conversation, and I can see he is interested in what I said, and I know he wants to meet her; though I don't know why I talk like that. Of course no one can resist Pauline."

"On the contrary," said the old lady, gently, "my granddaughter is a very special taste."

But the other was not to be turned aside. It was her firm belief that her niece, Pauline Gale, was one of the most fascinating and unscrupulous of women. She could pay her no higher compliment. In her own youth, Mrs. Wyeth had never thought of being either. Her awakening to the existence of such qualities had come late in life, and being a person of common sense, she was content to exhaust her enthusiasm for them in admiration of Pauline.

"Tell her," she continued, "that he will be with me over Sunday, and so she must bring her prettiest dresses, and be careful not to get into one of her impossible humors, and you'll see! I have hopes."

"Which only show, my dear Minnie, how little you understand," returned the old lady. "Pauline is not designing. I wish she were. It would be so much more consistent. She is not even mercenary."

Mrs. Wyeth had risen and was frankly examining the photographs that stood about. She never passed over any clue to the interesting intimacies that had a way of growing surprisingly quickly in the household of her kinswomen. Amusing people,

smart people, even great people came and went, and no one was ever any the wiser, unless one happened to be so fortunate as to meet them by accident. Mrs. Wyeth derived a good deal of satisfaction from the knowledge that with her such accidents were tolerably frequent. Her own maidenhood had known no complications of the heart, and certainly no reserves. When the late Mr. Wyeth had come a-courting her, her parents, her sister, even her friends had known quite as much about the matter as she did. It struck her, therefore, as something mysterious and very romantic that no one ever seemed to know anything about Pauline's affairs—no one at least, except Mrs. Crewe, and she might as well have been no one, for she never told, or hardly ever.

"Well," she said, replacing a photograph, which she had turned to the light to examine more closely, "you may not call it mercenary, but it seems to me to come to the same thing in the end. When a girl has no money of her own, and is so dependent on the comforts of life that she can't——"

"Oh, luxurious," said Mrs. Crewe. "My grand-

daughter is luxurious, if you like, but unfortunately not designing. That is what I complain of. Of course she must have money, but only because the base medium confers first editions and protects from ugly wall-papers. She belongs to a school which I should christen the Ideally-Material."

"Bless me, Mrs. Crewe, don't talk philosophy to me. I don't understand a word of it."

"There are few subjects of which I am more profoundly ignorant myself, but what, my dear Minnie, is the use of associating with our juniors if we do not pick up a little information from them? What I mean is that Pauline desires material things for an ideal purpose. A good dinner is not a good dinner to her, but rather a symbol that the sense of beauty pervades the kitchen. Her mental taste is as fastidious as her bodily. (I speak strongly.) You see, therefore, how hopelessly she is situated. The idea of poverty, painful as it is, is no more painful than the crude ambition to achieve a rich marriage. Both are intensely shocking, unless you can dress up one with taste, and the other with sentiment. With such a nature as hers, however, as I have often

told her, she will find riches the easier to dress up of the two. You follow me?"

It had been quite evident that Mrs. Crewe had been talking more to amuse herself than for the entertainment of her guest, who, needless to say had not followed her in the least, but had done what was quite as satisfactory to all parties, had ceased to listen. For her tour of inspection had brought her to the piano, and on this stood a sheet of music in manuscript, across one corner of which was written, in a man's hand:

"This is not mine. The train sang it all last night."

Mrs. Wyeth deciphered these words carefully before she raised her head and exclaimed:

"Goodness, Mrs. Crewe! I did hope we had heard the last of Mr. Rapier."

"I hear his name for the first time in many months."

Mrs. Wyeth sniffed. "There was a man I never liked, and glad I was when I heard he had gone away. I was in a great fright that Pauline was going to marry him."

"I understand the idea gained general credence," returned the elder lady, coolly.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Wyeth. The sound in itself was alarming, but when accompanied by a tightening of the lips and slight elevation of the chin, the result was awe-inspiring. After an instant she added: "I believe you positively liked the man."

"I believe I did," the other answered, meditatively. "He was irritating, of course, but he was intelligent, and treated no one as his mental inferior, not even his elders. When you get to my age, Minnie, you will find that a great luxury."

"I shall never find it a luxury to talk to Mr. Rapier—extremely supercilious, I call him, and fancying himself superior to everybody—so deep about the simplest subjects. Besides I shall never forgive him a speech he once made about Pauline. She was opposite us at dinner, and I said to him (I did not know how the land lay or I should never have said it, you may be sure), 'Ah, Mr. Rapier, I envy the man who wins that woman for his wife.' And he said—I remember his peculiar manner—'Really, Mrs. Wyeth, you think that the relation to

which she is most ideally suited?' I don't know, I don't care to understand, what he meant, but it is not the way I should have cared to have a man speak of me, when I was a girl."

Mrs. Crewe obviously refrained from replying that probably no one ever had.

Mrs. Wyeth, having now completed the circuit of the room, returned to the chair where she had been sitting, and picking up her gloves, stood putting them on.

"Nothing more about that new man—the one with the oil-well, I mean?" she asked.

The old lady extracted her knitting from the volume in which, on the entrance of Mrs. Wyeth, she had laid it to mark her place, before she answered:

"No, I don't think there will be anything further to hear. I fancy he has been dismissed. At least he came every day last week at two in the afternoon, and left Pauline so irritable that I am sure he had been making scenes."

"Oh, poor thing!" said Mrs. Wyeth.

"Don't waste your pity, Minnie. He was not in

love with her." Mrs. Crewe wagged her head wisely. "He wants to get on, and he judged Pauline to be the most available unmarried woman for his purpose. It showed some common-sense. Now he will be attentive to somebody like Mrs. Ashton, and eventually marry a little girl she will pick out for him, and they will give a very grand party to which Pauline will not be asked. So much for the oil-man."

"And she never considered him?"

"Dear Minnie, no! He had the most dreadful tricks. Called his frock-coat a Prince Albert, and bowed all the time he was talking to you."

Mrs. Wyeth fastened her gloves with a last strong dig—they did not button, they clasped. "But I don't quite see," she said, "why, if she never considered him, she should have minded so much."

Mrs. Crewe fairly laughed. "A very good point, Minnie. Let us say then that she considered him for the shortest possible time. Isn't that she?"

On this the subject of their conversation entered, with the grace that a well-made body bestows. She would have given the effect of too great slimness

had it not been for the long natural curves of her figure, which, it must be admitted, the cut of her garments did as little as possible to conceal. As for these garments themselves, one could only say that she was too well dressed; not that there was a suggestion of overfineness, but the eye grew weary of taking in such perfection of detail, point after point, too small to be noted, too delicious to be ignored. A good maid is indispensable, but such results come not forth by her aid alone. Such lovely purity of mulle and lace about the throat, such pretty contrast between tawny furs and turquoises clasping them, for all they are worn so unconsciously betray the wearer as having put time, mind, even a little of herself into the attainment of the effect. To this effect the wonderful freshness of her skin, the clear sharp line where her strongly growing hair began, not a little contributed. She seemed by merely being to divide all gentlewomen into two classes—those who had known what it was to be dishevelled and those who had not. If Mrs. Wyeth had been a younger or more self-conscious woman, she would have thrust her gloves, not worn, indeed,

but clumsy beside the perfectly fitting ones on the slender hands of her niece, into the concealment of her muff. As it was, she stretched them out in welcome, as she said:

"And what mischief have you been about lately, I should like to know?"

"Mischief! I stagnate in my own virtue. My grandmother has been having another of her disgraceful affairs with a young poet, who sits in her pocket and writes her sonnets on age, not knowing real youth when he sees it. Don't deny it, Louisa Crewe. But I—I am as the miller of Dee. Mischief, by which, Aunt Minnie, I apprehend you mean men, has been far from me." She crossed the room, straightening a photograph here and there which Mrs. Wyeth's curiosity had misplaced.

"Well, my dear," said the latter lady, "come out and spend Sunday with me, and we shall hear another story. I'll find something for you to do. I'll give you occupation—just such another as yourself, only worse. I don't know which is worse. One of those men always involved and never in love. You know the kind. You know all kinds, you wicked

creature, and I shall watch his subjugation with great interest."

Considering the fact that Pauline was as quick as another to know when she was made ridiculous, it was not a little to her credit that she contrived to be grateful for her aunt's affection while deploring its manifestation. Now she replied:

"N. B. Remember to tell my maid to remind me not to subjugate Mr.—— What is the gentleman's name? Don't go, Aunt Minnie."

"Hamlin is his name, my dear. I suppose you have heard of him? I must go. If I missed this train, Roberts would never wait until the next. You know what he is. He says it is on account of the horses, but I know it is because he hates waiting, and it is cold for him, especially at the station. Good-by, Mrs. Crewe. Friday then, Pauline. I read your last thing in the Monthly. About the Gaul, you know. I did not think it was quite——Well, I'm no judge of poetry, but I did not let Sylvia read it."

CHAPTER II

PAULINE'S parents had been dead for many years, and she had ever since made her home with her grandmother—a wit, a gentlewoman and an egotist. Now twice a widow, Mrs. Crewe was enjoying to its full the income which at her death would revert to her second husband's family. She had, unfortunately, been the superior mentally of both her husbands, had managed her relation to them with, as it were, one hand, and had arrived at the point of view that men were pleasant, fond creatures, but that the really important relations of life existed between women, notably kinswomen, mothers, sisters and daughters. She regarded men, in fact, very much as many men regard women, as necessary, commendable beings—scarcely companions. A natural sequence of this opinion was that, in spite of her two experiments, she did not consider matrimony in itself a very desirable condition. She could not understand a woman's being willing to pay so

high a price for the unlimited society of one man unless he had some more tangible advantage to offer her. She explained her own romantic union with Mr. Gale on the score of extreme youth, and could have added further, that she had been infinitely happier with Mr. Crewe and his money.

From her youth up Pauline had heard poignant sympathy expressed for those about to enter the holy state in poverty. She had a large number of impecunious cousins who seemed to have no idea of marriage as a means of establishing themselves financially. Such sentences as "One of those forlorn, interminable engagements, you know, all the disadvantages of matrimony and none of the pleasures," or "Poor creature, you remember her quite a pretty girl, and now she's living in that squalid apartment taking care of her own baby," had from her youth struck terror to Pauline's heart. "Squalid" was in particular a word that rang like a knell with a meaning beyond its own, as with some children the words the "dead of night" express an hour too terrible to be registered on any clock.

Nobody knowing the inner history of Pauline's

childhood would have found there much encouragement for such practical teachings. She had learnt to read early, and had at once become a constant reader, though scarcely one of wide scope. As a matter of fact she was wont to read and reread the same story for weeks at a time. Her elders, repeating her doings with omniscient smiles, were accustomed to attribute the practice to laziness, explaining that it was of course easier for "the little thing" to go over old ground rather than break new. They were quite mistaken. Her choice was thus limited because for long periods she became some one of the characters of whom she read. No other for the time could interest her.

Unseeing rulers who hurried her from the nursery fireside to outdoor games little suspected in seeing the sad, crouching figure that this was Cinderella, and that their tyrannical command only served to give life to her conception of a cruel stepmother.

A few years later her gentle silence at table was often commented upon by stray guests, especially those possessed of less docile offspring. In truth,

Pauline was almost unconscious of their presence. She was temporarily a knight of Arthur's court. The strangers who came and went served her purpose in representing vaguely other knights of the Table Round.

She still remembered the thrill she felt at discovering Matthew Arnold's "Tristram and Iseult," while still unable to take in more than a few lines here and there. She believed that she had at last found authentic utterance. She could be happy for hours together, rocking in a huge chair on the veranda, looking out over the lawns, exclaiming, to an imaginary Tristram beside her:

"The calm sea shines, loose hang the vessel's sails;
Before us are the sweet green fields of Wales,
And overhead the cloudless sky of May.
Oh, would I were in those green fields at play
Not pent on shipboard this delicious day!"

When on a chilly autumn afternoon, the gardener picked her out of the fountain, no one suspected that she had deliberately climbed in, in order the better to enact Undine. She would have under-

gone all things rather than mention these visionary companions of her waking hours.

Her first visit to a theatre had been an era in her life. She never forgot her astonishment and rapture at finding that grown men and women were spending their lives very much as she did—so she interpreted the drama—and the magnificence of their game exceeded her wildest fancies.

This sort of thing ran on until she was almost grown up—the prose writers, however, replacing the poets. Now the traces of it were still to be seen in her belief that beauty and romance were things of everyday life, and not matters to be read of and laid away. No wonder that trailing such clouds of glory, the meagre domesticity of her cousins had not presented itself to her as one form of romance. From her youth she had been taken by Mrs. Crewe to visit these terrible examples, and had shuddered to hear them expatiate alternately on the fulness of their happiness and the delinquencies of the maid-of-all-work. Her pity went out to them not, like her grandmother's, because of their personal discomforts, but because in Pauline's eyes they

appeared to be dragging their romance through the kitchen. She felt toward the refinements of life —a term of wide meaning—much as most people feel toward the habit of personal cleanliness. Such are some of the minor results of grafting the mercenary upon an artistic temperament.

It would indeed have been simpler if she had been rendered mercenary, as within certain clean, intelligent limits Mrs. Crewe was. Pauline was less logical. It is indeed wonderful how easily clever people avoid thinking. Pauline was under the impression that she was preserving her ideals, as long as she put off doing anything absolutely unworthy, while all the time she was allowing herself to become more dependent upon a life that left her less and less free to choose.

It was of course a pleasant one. With her grandmother's house and striking personality as a background, with her own wit and beauty well to the fore, she occupied as pleasant a position as may be attained by an unmarried woman under modern conditions. She was an important member of two enviable "gangs," both grateful to her for

bringing them together. She was at once very "smart" and very literary, and if it were true, as some people intimated, that the poets valued her for being smart, and the other people for being literary, these facts did not make the least difference, as long as the opposite camps did not suspect them.

Pauline had not fortunately any ambition to be a great poet, or any illusion that she ever could be. Exactly what she did want of her pretty facility, it would have been hard for her to say. What its result had been was perfectly simple. It had served her as an admirable social instrument. It gave her style, distinction—for at times it came near being a talent—and differentiated her from a dozen other well-dressed and handsome women. On the other hand it afforded her an opportunity to meet clever men and women, who, if she had been without it, would never in busy lives have had time to waste on her type. It had, in short, been a potent factor in the admirable arrangement of her life, an arrangement so satisfactory that any change, it seemed, would have been for the worse.

A change, however, connected with the mortality of Mrs. Crewe was just what was inevitably approaching, whether near or far, and the manner in which this could be least disagreeably dealt with was exactly the problem the two ladies had to consider.

Mrs. Crewe's solution had the advantage of simplicity and practicability. Pauline was to marry a rich man. She never put it like this. There was no need. She did not suppose that anyone, least of all her own granddaughter, would seriously question so obvious a conclusion. She saw in Pauline's delay only a natural desire to select as creditable an array of qualities as possible; but she felt at times disposed to point out that there were disadvantages connected with a delay too protracted. Perhaps if the situation had ever been mentioned between them it would have appeared that Pauline agreed with her grandmother, at least in theory. It was in the practice that she found the plan so impossible. The position of a woman who merely wants to marry money should not be so difficult, considering the number of well-to-do bachelors. The harder prob-

lem is for those who will not marry the man of their hearts without it—who demand not only a millionaire, but a millionaire whom they can love.

Necessity, however, as we are frequently called upon to observe, knows no laws, especially no laws of taste, and Pauline would very probably have drifted along the line of least resistance had not the situation been further complicated by the entrance of Michael Rapier.

To the house of a Mrs. Burton—a young widow, with the eyes of a woman, the figure of a girl and the fortune of a peeress—Pauline, one evening, went unsuspectingly forth. She had been invited to a musicale. A string quartette which might have lured hundreds was playing to a dozen people in a high, airy drawing-room. The room was a fair reproduction of a Louis XV. salon, and at the delicious caprice of its owner was lit entirely by wax candles. Pauline had gone in a faint striped brocade, a patch at the corner of her mouth, a velvet about her throat. Except for the absence of powder, she might, as she sat on a slender carved sofa, have

been a marquise of half a century before the Revolution.

During the first pause in the music, Hermann Crisp, the artist, had said to her, abruptly:

"I want you to know the man who is talking to the 'cellist. It's Rapier, the composer."

Pauline had already noticed him, mainly, perhaps, because in the presence of twelve of his fellow-creatures, he dared deliberately close his eyes in listening. The blank eyelid had given emphasis to the absolute lack of expression of his face in repose, a lack difficult to remember when his eyes, so deep set as to be almost cavernous, opened. She registered an observed difference in his bearing, distinguishing him from the men about him. Their movements were alert, but lacked a certain decision—and she had almost used the word grace—noticeable in his. She was conscious, too, that to Fanny Burton he seemed to be her most important guest, and that by constantly appealing to him in her pathetic way, she contrived to keep him pretty continuously at her side.

A little later, he was standing before Pauline,

but as they opened their mouths to address each other in the conventionalities of opening sentences, the music again began. He sat down in silence, and they forgot each other's existence. In a barely audible, piercingly sweet harmony he heard her catch her breath. Their eyes met and neither again forgot the proximity of the other. Not until he had left her did she discover that he had written music to her own words. She was amused at the reserve that had not mentioned the fact, and very susceptible to the flattery. Rapier occupied a prominent position in the musical world, or rather had had for some years a distinct vogue. He had lived most of his life in Paris, where his father had held a small diplomatic position. Here Michael had scored his first success, and here he still found his most appreciative critics.

Pauline, during the few weeks between the evening she met him and the day their friendship became a love-affair, was delighted to find how cordially Mrs. Crewe approved of him. She froze under deference paid to her age, and thawed at homage to her intellect. This she perceived Rapier offered her in often disagreeing with her. There was,

she found, a certain excitement in being called upon to stand and deliver reasons for opinions she had acquired naturally in the process of life and had never given herself the trouble to think about at all.

Old people of active mind are apt to find themselves with strangers much in the same position as intelligent children, who, no matter how able to contribute to the conversation, are obliged to fall back to the rôle custom allots them. Pauline and Mrs. Crewe had often smiled in private over suitors of the girls who had attempted to win the old lady's favor by reverential demeanor, hasty agreement, attention to shawls, solicitude concerning draughts. Had such an one heard her comments in his absence, he would have admitted that age had not wholly destroyed the power of her tongue. One of these gentlemen, elated by a discussion with Pauline relating to the position of women in art—a discussion that he felt could not be of interest to the elderly, had at length turned to the old lady, as good manners demanded, and said: "I suppose young people had better things to talk about in your days, Mrs. Crewe."

"Ah, my dear sir," she returned, "it's true the wise men of one generation talk as the fools of the next, but the difference between wise men and fools remains constant."

The gentleman smiled and bowed, not exactly understanding and being too well brought up to be capable of associating gray hair and malice.

Rapier, who, unlike this unfortunate, had had his standards better adjusted by that inestimable boon a brilliant mother, did not fall into this error. He and Mrs. Crewe had many an enlivening conflict, and grew friendly over them.

They had as a matter of fact not a little in common. They were both, if not simple people, at least all of a piece, in strong contrast to Pauline's various and opposing tendencies. They were both determined and persistent, desiring vehemently whatever they desired at all. For this reason when they did clash they clashed violently.

Mrs. Crewe, aware of these qualities in Rapier, was betrayed by them into believing at first that he was not in love with Pauline. She could have given you her reasons.

In her youth all the men who had ever been in love with her—they had doubtless found it an unsatisfactory experience—had at once become socially unavailable, had fidgeted, had demanded, had stood in corners, glowering at other comers. She watched Michael carefully for any such symptoms, and finally came to the conclusion that he appeared to prefer general conversation, that instead of suspecting possible rivals in other visitors, he found merely companions to his taste. That a man could be so sure of his position as to be a stranger to jealousy did not seem to her credible. Only a fool could ever have felt such assurance with her. She saw that Michael was not a fool, and interpreted his calm as indifference.

Another source of comfort lay in the fact that being a poor man, he did not, as his intimacy with Pauline advanced, display any of that frenzied enthusiasm for money-making which had been a danger-signal in the case of other impecunious adorers. No one, Mrs. Crewe argued, had ever supposed that it would be a pleasure to support Pauline on a small income, and she read in this contentment

of Rapier's the fact that matrimony had no place in his life. She summed him up as a deliberately self-sufficing person, finding in his art the necessary outlet for both the energy and the sentiment of his nature.

She had thus in supposed security committed herself to liking him before the idea occurred to her that he was in reality the first danger to her ambition that had ever presented itself. She could not have told what aroused her suspicions. She suddenly found them so deeply arrayed as to form almost a conviction. Perhaps she awakened suddenly to a change in Pauline. It was as if the girl felt herself blown out of her course, and was now orienting herself anew.

That a composer too precious to be popular, with an income of a few thousands a year, should actually menace her plans was a shock and a surprise to Mrs. Crewe. The fact that she thought him one of the most charming men of her acquaintance in no way influenced her. She told herself, none the less, that it was absolutely impossible that Pauline should be contemplating marriage with a person so sit-

uated, and yet she deeply feared that such was the case.

In the twinkling of an eye her manner toward him changed. From a pleasant, racy antagonist she became a carefully polite old lady. The change effected little but the wreck of her influence over Pauline. Fortunately the girl did not suspect how bitterly Mrs. Crewe reproached herself for not having the courage to forbid Rapier the house. She was fond of saying that she had no moral sense, but a feeling more fanatical urged upon her the necessity of forcing Pauline to be wise.

Mrs. Crewe, however, like the nearest and dearest of many of us, had awakened to the crisis just after it had ceased to exist. After weeks of bitter struggle, the question had been decided.

The progress of a man like Rapier toward the things he desires is never easy to stop, particularly for the woman who, with his full knowledge, loves him. The thing which to the exclusion of all other he wanted was Pauline, and it said much for the strength of her determination, that torn as she was by all sorts of conflicting and complex motives, she

yet steadily withstood him. Her reason was not like her grandmother's—that she was reserving herself for better value, but rather that she could better go without his love than drag it through the wear and tear of poverty. How then could some of the bloom not be rubbed off? From this belief not all the simplicity of Michael's passion could bring her.

Nor was this the only point at issue between them. Pauline, while refusing to marry him, still wanted to compromise, to give herself the comfort of seeing him, at least occasionally. With this proposition he would have nothing to do. Not all her arts could shake him. For a month they tortured each other, forcing their different solutions.

One morning, a few days later, Pauline said to her grandmother:

"I don't think I told you that Mr. Rapier had gone to South America, did I?"

Mrs. Crewe had never been gladder to hear anything.

"For a long time?" she asked.

"For ever, I fancy."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Crewe, "I don't think I ever met a more delightful person."

The words stabbed Pauline. They showed so plainly that Mrs. Crewe had laid aside her weapons. All danger was over.

CHAPTER III

ONE afternoon, while Pauline was drinking her tea in solitude, the door opened and Herman Crisp presented himself. It was the highest possible tribute to his reputation that the butler had admitted him without protest. He wore neither gloves nor overcoat, though the day was cold. His short blue serge jacket was dusty and worn, and he carried an impossible brown felt hat in his hand, as if to mark the rapidity of his entrance, which had not been delayed at the hat-rack.

He stood just inside the curtains, an enormous figure, carrying his ungainliness with such utter unconcern as to render it almost a grace, certainly the most characteristic element in his robust personality.

"I've come to know how much longer this sort of thing is to go on?" he asked, loudly. "I have been trying to work, and, by Heaven, I kept getting into such rages I could not see the canvas."

On his entrance Miss Gale had rung the bell, and now said to the man who answered it, "Mr. Crisp's liqueur."

"Why," continued Crisp, not deigning to notice these arrangements for his comfort, "why should a valuable man like Rapier be exiled to South America so that you may stay here? Why, if this town cannot hold you both, should not you go? Oh, I know what you are going to say, that you are valuable, too. Well, it is just what I deny. You are not valuable at all. The impression is deep in your mind, but it isn't true. You are just an ordinary every-day girl."

"Did I ever claim to be anything else?"

"There, *there!*" cried Crisp, shaking a confident hand at tiers of imaginary auditors. "Could anything be more thoroughly commonplace than that? Just what a school-girl would say. 'Did I ever claim to be anything else!' "

"I don't know why it is," remarked Pauline, patiently, "that, being tolerably calm myself, I am thrown with such violent intimates. Louisa Crewe, for all her gentle manner, is at times ex-

tremely coarse. Michael is as a sword, and you are always so brutal——"

"You mean," returned her visitor, "that we don't all go tiptoeing about in the same beautiful mist that you do."

"Here is your tea, Herman."

The great man flung his crumpled hat into the corner of a chair, and took the amber-colored liquid, which, with the help of the liqueur, she had concocted for him.

She leaned back on the sofa, resting her elbow on the back, and at length said, temperately:

"Of course I do not exactly see why, as *I* don't think I am of any special importance, and *you* don't think so, the matter should come up so fiercely between us."

"Because you *do* think so. You can say what you like, but your conduct speaks for itself. You think you have an atmosphere. You value yourself on it. An atmosphere! Good Heavens! And on what does it depend? On your long throat and your good clothes, and your grandmother (who really is a clever woman), and your nice little talent—talent,

pooh! What am I talking about? Your nice little facility at verse-making." (A vibrating finger and thumb indicated its lack of depth.) "And I read a review of your poems the other day that would have made Shakespeare thoughtful."

"Really, Herman, I do not write my own reviews."

"No, you couldn't," roared Crisp. "I don't suppose you could write a coherent review of anything to save your neck. You have put your finger on one of the crying evils of the age. People are allowed to produce what they are told are works of art—'Art!' Just Heaven! when they have not had the training—— But that is not the point. The point is Michael's absurd overestimate of you."

"Michael has no illusions about me. Make your mind easy."

"Illusions! He has the idea that you are of great importance in the scheme of things. I am not sure but what he thinks you have great qualities. In my opinion if you had a trace of such a thing about you he would not have gone to South America alone. You would be there with him, instead of

staying here like a child at a Christmas-tree, hypnotized by the crackers and the candles."

"But, my dear man, if the crackers and the candles are the things that make my atmosphere, without which, by your own showing, I should be nothing, don't you see——"

"Oh, I see perfectly. Don't trouble yourself. I see the whole situation clearly enough. Only once and for all, let us dispose of the idea of you as a unique, a specially gifted creature. And it comes to this: Michael has exiled himself for the sake of a commonplace pretty girl, or had we better say woman?"

"Since you ask, I shall be twenty-six in February."

"For the sake, then, of a pretty woman, whom some people don't think so extraordinarily pretty after all. Well, I am more of an admirer of your type than most people."

"You flatter me by admitting that I have a type. How do you describe it?"

Crisp conveyed his cup under his fierce yellow and gray mustache before he answered:

"The elegantly dangerous." He scarcely gave her time to consider this before he asked: "Does he write to you?"

Pauline looked as if she had half a mind to tell an old friend to mind his own business, but at length, as if the subject were too important to permit of small-mindedness, she answered that he did not.

"Well, he does to me. I have had a letter from him, and he says——"

"Don't tell me, please, Herman. I do not care to have news at second hand. If it ever becomes unendurable, I shall write myself. Until then, I want to hear nothing."

Herman got up, shrugging his heavy shoulders, picked up his hat, and, pleating it into fresh undesirable folds, said, as if at last the true object of his visit appeared:

"I want Michael back."

At this Pauline appeared to revolve many forms of expression, and then, deciding on the most forcible, said, simply:

"So do I."

"If you sent for him he would come."

"Very true."

"Then why isn't he here? This has all been your doing."

"Ah, no. There you are wrong, Herman. This was his own decision. I did not want him to go. I was willing to do anything to keep him, except——"

"Except marry him?"

"Except marry him. That, as you have so plainly shown, I could not do. If I had a single great quality, I could be poor. Great people may be poor, but I, being just a creature of my surroundings, of an artificial atmosphere, I should go out like a candle. There would be nothing left—nothing left precisely for Michael to love——"

"Stop," Crisp shouted. "Be as weak and whimsical as you like about yourself, but leave him out of it. He is at least a *man*, and would love you just the same in rags."

"But not in ready-made clothes."

"Good God, must I teach you such elementary things about him! He would love you in anything,

and so much the worse for him. Do you suppose he cares for your trappings? That is adding insult to injury. It is not any problem to him. Don't lay that flattering unction to your soul. Realize once and for all that a man is a simple creature in such situations as this. He wants *you*. Be honest enough to say that it is you who don't care enough to make it worth while to give up your comforts and your position for him. There is not, as our commercial friends say, enough in it. But never again look at me with that expression in your eyes as if you were a victim of Fate. The man who won't trade because the price isn't good enough isn't a martyr."

"With what confidence, Herman, you settle other people's destinies. The matter is not quite as simple as you think it. Fortunately, Michael understands."

"I don't believe it."

"He understands."

"It is a slander. He accepts it as of your making."

There was a pause.

"Will you send for him?"

"I will not."

"What are you hoping for? Another man like Michael with the means to give you all the other things you value as well? Do you really suppose it falls to the lot of one woman to be loved by two real men in the course of her life—such men as that, I mean?"

Pauline pushed away her cup, and folded her hands with meekness on the edge of the tray.

"Herman," she said, "I am afraid I can't discuss it, even with you; I have thought about it too much and too long."

"Thought about it! Thought round about it, you mean. If you had ever had a glimmer of reason on the subject you would not give up the only chance you will ever have at life for the sake of trailing lovely skirts through suitable halls."

Even this did not rouse her. Looking at her, he saw she was firm in her resolution not to follow him, so, with a change of tone, he said:

"Anyhow your clothes were better when you were more flagrant. You are too subtle now. Who

understands all these lilacs and pinks? I do; but then I am an artist."

On this he took his departure.

It was characteristic of Pauline that she was never able to decide whether the pleasure of hearing Michael's name mentioned by a friend at all compensated her for the wear and tear of interviews like this. She could never be sure whether Crisp's affection for him made him a welcome or unwelcome guest. Now he had left her revolving every question she was most determined to put out of her mind. What, after all, was she waiting for? —merely that Fate should catch up with and overcome her? Had she any particular hope? any scheme? Was the power to say no the only choice she was capable of exercising? She was not entirely without an answer. She told herself that inaction was often the most effective of policies; that she had done the hardest and rarest thing for a woman—had stayed her hand; that time was an element to be reckoned with; that in a few years she would look at things differently. Who could tell but what she might hit on, if not a solu-

tion, at least a makeshift that would creditably carry her through the rest of life.

The day was not yet over. At eight Mrs. Burton's carriage stopped to take her to the theatre. When the door was shut on the inviolable solitude that a brougham affords, the little widow folded Pauline's cloak more securely about her, patting the girl as she did so with the little air of motherliness that she allowed herself as a contrast to the cool maidenliness of her appearance. "Surely this is a new cloak, dear. What, only refreshed? A perfect Phœnix. Keep your pretty self warm on this bitter night. And I have been in the tropics all day. I had a letter from that pleasantest of writers, Michael Rapier."

"Michael," thought Pauline, with some bitterness, "has been doing up his correspondence." Aloud she said, with a tone nicely adjusted between politeness and interest, "And what did he have to say?"

That she could ask this now and not of Crisp arose simply from the knowledge that Herman would have told her. From this lady she knew she

would hear nothing of any consequence, nothing intimate. These two women liked, amused, almost loved each other, but they treated several subjects with neatly concealed reserve. Neither was of the type to whom the company of her own sex is essential, and as a luxury they sacrificed nothing important to it. They were extremely confidential and enlivening in discussing many men and not a few women, but it was to be observed that, though the name of Rapier was often mentioned between them, nothing of the slightest importance was ever said in this connection.

"Oh, he said what I suppose he says to all his friends. Volcanoes, waterfalls, the Pacific in plain view, a boundless coffee plantation, and he himself all day long in the saddle."

Pauline was silent, debating whether the statement that he did not write to her would be baffling or enlightening; whether Mrs. Burton would accept it as a sign that they had never been as good friends as they appeared, or a proof that their relation had been so serious as to make any break a final one. She compromised at length with:

"He has not yet found time to write to me, and yet I am very much interested to know how he gets on there. Who but Mr. Rapier would go two thousand miles to visit a man he has seen once since he was grown up?"

"You a poet, my dear, with so little sense of romance. Don Ramon Heredia was in love with Michael's mother."

"Who must by all accounts have been a charming person."

"Oh, my dear, such a woman! beautiful and witty, and a musician as well. I have heard it all from her relations on the other side. When this young Spanish-American was sent to Paris to see life and first saw her, it was all over with him. He fell hopelessly in love with her. She was leading a very busy, active sort of life—her husband was in the diplomatic service, you know—and she appears never to have had the least idea of the young man's feeling for her. But when she died, and her son was left an orphan, Don Ramon seems to have assumed that Michael would come and live with him, and to have been bitterly disappointed at his

refusal. But for years they have corresponded."

"And now that they have met?"

"Oh, a great success! Michael feels the greatest admiration for his host. He describes him as the most interesting combination of a man of the world and a hermit—as a person who, with a wonderful command of language, has an almost indefinite capacity for silence. You can imagine them, now disposing of the affairs of nations, now failing to address each other for days at a time. I can see Michael. He would enjoy such a companion. I have known him so long!"

Pauline said nothing. She was in the habit of conceding intimacy to Mrs. Burton. That lady now took her silence as a suggestion that the subject in hand was exhausted.

"You have seen this play we are being taken to, my dear?"

Pauline said, rather shortly, that she had not. She recognized that she could not with decency renew the topic.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. WYETH'S house, which stood in a fertile farming country not far from New York, was new, high, and wooden. It was shingled without, and within it had been lavishly decorated by the architect, under whose supervision the furniture also had been selected, so that, as Mrs. Wyeth very justly said, if it were not a success no one could blame *her*. The architect had decided in favor of green for the hall—even the hat-brush had a green plush back; the dining-room was red, and so, by a natural process of exclusion, the drawing-room could be nothing but yellow. No one, however, could have been prepared for the introduction of robin's-egg blue in the ceiling and deep frieze. The originator himself, indeed, after looking on the result was in the habit of repudiating his handiwork, under a lament that "one was so seldom left free." Showing, perhaps, a partial knowledge of his employer, he had left no place for pictures on his curved and broken wall-spaces. It was particularly unfortu-

nate, therefore, that Mrs. Wyeth should have chosen to dot them over with photographs of her family and friends in gilt frames.

The following Friday afternoon, when Pauline got out of the train, she found her aunt and cousin on the station platform.

Mrs. Wyeth was as usual voluble.

"How do you do, my dear? Give your check to Roberts. There, Sylvia, do you see your cousin's hat? Now, perhaps, you are sorry you opposed me about scarlet velvet. Get in, Pauline. Home, Roberts. No, not Mrs. Jones's. *Home!* HOME!! Perhaps you can tell me, my dear, why I am always afflicted with deaf servants." She paused, leaning back with benevolent alertness, and then as nobody at once took up the thread, she herself continued, briskly: "Your natural prey was coming with us. He wanted to be among the first to receive you, but when the carriage came to the door he was digging in the green-house. Oh, yes, indeed. He spends a great part of his time there. He has a theory about coloring hydrangeas. He and the gardener are busy half the day over it. I expect them to ruin all my best

plants. What is that, Sylvia? Have you any reason to suppose that Mr. Hamlin knows anything about hydrangeas? No, nor I either."

When they entered the blue and yellow drawing-room, a man was bending over the fire. On perceiving them, he dropped his cigarette from his right hand, and retaining the tongs in his left advanced to meet them, expressing in the most delightful voice that Pauline had ever listened to, his regret that the carriage had gone away without him. He was barely taller than she, thin, without being particularly slim. His eyes, like his voice, were singularly pleasant. At the first glance she found his appearance commonplace. At the next, she accused him of a deliberate, studied unobtrusiveness in demeanor and dress. Finally she came to the conclusion that the most perfect presentation of a gentleman was now before her.

"There, there," said Mrs. Wyeth, "don't apologize. We'll see where you are when she is going away. Bless me! The fire is not smoking."

Hamlin smiled, half in excuse, half in triumph.

"*I* stopped it," he said. His ways had the extreme

gentleness, the suggestion of infinite patience and absence of irritability, so often seen in men who are really "good" on a horse. "The chimney-pot was out of order. There is a wonderful view from your roof. I studied the whole country, and I think I understand better the position of the two properties."

Mrs. Wyeth explained. "He is going to settle here, and buy half the county. Here is another neighbor for you, Mr. Hamlin—at least in summer. Her grandmother owns that old gray stone house you admired the other day. Is not that an inducement?"

"The greatest," said Hamlin with an effort, as if he preferred that civility should not be taken from him by force.

Pauline found herself irritated. She was not after all to blame because her aunt was so obviously waiting for his subjugation to begin, with the manner of a spectator before the curtain rises—eager and watchful. Pauline herself had made no effort to attract him. She was as conscious as he that every time she spoke, Mrs. Wyeth turned triumphantly

to note his admiration. Looking at the obstinate line of his jaw, Pauline judged that nothing could be more unfavorable to the existence of such admiration than the good lady's evident expectation of it. She was indeed vain enough to believe that without her aunt's anticipation, he would have been more desirous of pleasing her. She did not immediately perceive that there was another element in the situation, that Sylvia, too, was watching the effect produced.

Sylvia was now almost eighteen, possessed of a blonde, child-like beauty which appealed so little to her mother, who admired the dashing or mysterious, that the girl had grown up wholly unconscious of her advantages. She was distinguished by an ability to be quiet without being inert, and gentle without lacking decision. She had always been silent, thus serving her mother as an excellent auditor, but now she seemed more disinclined than ever to speech.

The conversation turned on Hamlin's prospective purchase. He was hesitating between two pieces of land. One at some distance from the Wyeths'

took in acres of woods and brooks. The other almost at their doors was more fertile, but bare of trees. Pauline, knowing that Sylvia was familiar with every stick in the ground and stone in the water of both, waited to hear her give an opinion, and when she continued silent, asked for it. The girl scarcely looked up.

"I should choose the woods," she said, "and build a house on the slope above the brook."

"You see, Miss Gale, she wants me as far away as possible."

"I want you to like this part of the country," said Sylvia, fixing him with earnest blue eyes. He met the look an instant before he answered: "I do," with a tone that seemed to Pauline to say a good deal more than the words. Sylvia was coloring. Pauline looked at her aunt to see how she was affected by the incident. She had not observed it.

"For my part," she was saying, "I think you are very foolish to build at all. What does a bachelor want with a great establishment? Wait until you are married. Now, don't tell me you are never going to marry. You are just like other men, and will

marry fast enough when you find the right woman; at least, if she will have you." (Pauline did not dare look up for fear of encountering a sly glance.) "He has a theory that he is incapable of love. Fiddlesticks, I say."

"It's not friendly, Aunt Minnie, to take away so legitimate an excuse for caprice."

As soon as she had spoken Pauline saw how deeply she had antagonized, or at least depressed, the subject of her pleasantry. He smiled faintly, looked blank, and as palpably retired from the conversation as if he had removed his bodily presence.

It was now Sylvia who rose and said firmly that it was high time they were all dressing for dinner. Mrs. Wyeth sprang up with her customary alacrity, and left the room with Pauline, who was not surprised that the other two did not immediately follow. Sylvia had dropped a hat-pin, and Hamlin on his hands and knees was looking for it. Pauline had seen it quite plainly sticking in the fringe of the sofa, and doubted if he were less observant. If, however, he wanted a minute with the girl alone, he gained it.

When they were alone, she said with an inflated enthusiasm that unfortunately at the last moment a prick of anxiety punctured:

"Is she not all that I told you—charming and beautiful?"

"Well," said Hamlin, "is she? Perhaps, but you won't mind my saying that for me her smile spoils it all—just like that, in one corner of her mouth." He shook his head sadly, and Sylvia knew he was lamenting, not her cousin's shortcomings, but his own deplorable nicety of observation. "However," he added, more cheerfully, "I am delighted she has come."

"Why?" asked the girl.

The little pause that dramatizes intervened. Then he said:

"I should not like Mrs. Wyeth to feel lonely."

Sylvia's eyelids flickered up and down once or twice, and then she smiled. It was to be observed that her smile was perfectly symmetrical.

Pauline, meantime, as she dressed for dinner, was giving the matter her attention. It may be laid down as an axiom that be one never so wise and so

well-informed, a third person cannot understand a love-affair. Pauline, who was not without wisdom, was, in this case, singularly without knowledge. The clues were slight; the happenings almost matters of the imagination—a look, a tone, and an unfound hat-pin.

Yet if her fancy had not taken fire too quickly, this was indeed the very properest form in which love could come to Sylvia. It was most suitable that a man approaching a creature as reserved, as young, as typical of all purity as this girl, should do so in a manner so delicate that not even her own mother suspected it!

And yet, was there not another aspect? Pauline's brush drooped slowly along her hair, and lay idle in her lap, as the idea formulated itself. Why should a man, older and of ample means, who controlled a girl's rare smile, and had the power to manœuvre her away from her relations, why should he be taking so much trouble to conceal. Why was so much manœuvring necessary in a friendly country? Was this after all an exhibition of delicacy, or of hesitation, and did this caution concern

Sylvia's feelings, or his own? Finesse was a pretty enough ability for a distressed lover, but in one before whom lay no obstacles, it bore a different interpretation.

She put in a doubt with every hair-pin.

Like many people who have insisted on receiving undiluted their own knowledge of men and things, Pauline was particularly eager to save others from disillusion. Between her and Sylvia a strong affection had long existed. Sylvia admired Pauline—everything she was or did, but within the limits of a nature essentially cool; while Pauline, turning to one single quality, the crystal simplicity of the girl, prized it with a frenzy of unlikeness.

Feeling the equality of their admiration, they would have repudiated the idea that a taint of discipleship existed between them, yet naturally Pauline had great influence with the girl. Many of Sylvia's enthusiasms, most of her tastes, had been taken ready-made from the older woman. Nor was Pauline content with this office of spiritual middleman. She was in the habit of saying that she never made presents, because no one of taste could give

anything but the best and the best she was unfortunately obliged to keep for herself as she was the only person in the world who could appreciate it. There must, however, have been a flaw in her logic, for many things, some of value and all of beauty, found their way from her possession to Sylvia's.

There was in short such a relation between them as to justify a word of warning.

She had no more than reached this point when there was a knock at the door, and the girl, already dressed, slid into the room.

"Can I help you?" she said.

Pauline was one of those women who, if they do not bring their own maid, monopolize their hostess's. It appeard Sylvia could help her.

"My slippers, there's a dear. I shall certainly be late. And then would you mind hooking my dress?"

"How pretty it is, Pauline. I like you in blue."

"Wait until you come to fasten it. It is very tight."

During this operation, while her face was well hidden behind her cousin's back, Sylvia said:

"It sounds absurd from me to you, Pauline, who have so much tact, but I don't believe you know how much pain you give when you say such things as you did this afternoon—to Mr. Hamlin, I mean, about being capricious."

It was not quite like this that Pauline had expected the subject to be approached, but she said, readily:

"I divined that I had failed to please."

"You laugh, but you don't understand. Of course I don't either. I have only known him a week, and I am so much younger, but he has talked to me a little about himself, and it is rather sad. He is not a happy person. He tries, but his nature——"

"My dear Sylvia," said her cousin who, up to this point had kept silent with difficulty, "distrust a man with a nature. It is more troublesome than a vice. I have made it a rule that if anybody's nature is going to be studied and allowed for, it shall be mine. I recommend the idea to you. Can you tie the drawing-string a little tighter?"

"I could not make that a rule, because I am

afraid I have not got a nature. I am commonplace. Everything amuses me. (Is that tight enough?) That is why I feel so sorry for Mr. Hamlin. He is so complicated, and so sensitive. One so often hurts his feelings without meaning to, by things sometimes that one could not help, like mamma's wanting me to go on an errand when I had been going to drive with him. No, it doesn't hurt his feelings exactly, but it depresses him. Of course I don't like to depress anyone, especially anyone who has been as kind as Mr. Hamlin. You see you are so clever, Pauline, and you say things that he might never forget, and I want you to like each other."

"Oh," said Pauline, "I am all prepared to acknowledge his charm."

Sylvia smiled a smile of flattered ownership, and her cousin, seeing it in the glass, recognized its deep significance. In a moment the girl said, aloud:

"I think he is very different from other people."

"Perhaps. Yet I fancy I have met his like. It is surprising how many people you find have natures, if you encourage them to talk about them."

There was a pause, then Sylvia said:

"I must pin this on the shoulder."

Pauline accepted the reply as final.

Dinner, the evening, the two days that followed did little to dispel her doubts. Her mind grew weary with the succession of details she could not help observing, so subtle that her faculties were taxed to perceive their existence. If Sylvia left the room, she found herself wondering if Hamlin would follow, and if he did with what excuse he would explain his going; and when she heard it, so plausible was it that she wondered whether after all it were not the truth. One moment she could almost believe him tenderly and truly in love, and saw his attraction with a friendly eye, noted the perfection of his horsemanship, his simple bearing in the saddle, and fancied that the ascent thither changed him in Sylvia's eyes only from a fairy prince to a knight of chivalry. She sighed for her own early youth, the time when the flattery of a man a few years older can give a pleasure that ever afterward an emperor could not bestow. She tried to make out if the girl in her reception of him was

governed by the gentleness of her nature or the iciness of youth.

But these moments were rare. Gradually she became convinced that Hamlin was not a lover, that the indirectness of his courtship arose not from over-sensitive regard for his lady-love, so much as from the uncertainty of his own feelings. The situation was not pleasant to one who loved Sylvia. Mrs. Wyeth, through her very unconsciousness, was playing to perfection the part of designing mother, while Pauline herself, however reluctantly, became more and more aware of the man's attraction. He was singularly lovable—she knew no better word. He was not clever, but so earnestly appreciative that his companions could scarcely avoid shining, in their own eyes as well as his, and the love of detail, which in general made him so unspontaneous, led him in tête-à-tête to show an interest in the minutiæ of another's life which appeared the most intimate flattery to those who did not see its cause.

Even Pauline, who thought she understood the position of affairs, and to whom he paid little more

attention than his ingrained politeness required, found herself enjoying the few conversations she held with him.

The last evening of Pauline's stay, Sylvia was going to a party. She came downstairs about nine o'clock, looking positively embarrassed at being so lovely. Hamlin, Mrs. Wyeth, and Pauline were standing in the hall as the maid put on her wraps.

"Now, why in the world, my dear," said her mother, "have you put a real rose in your hair? In an hour it will look forlorn."

"It would be a shame to touch it, Aunt Minnie," said Pauline. She spoke purely from æsthetic conviction, and the next instant regretted it, as she saw Hamlin and Sylvia exchange looks of relief.

Was neutrality impossible?

Hamlin now produced a letter from his pocket and asked if the coachman would register it in the village.

"He may, if you choose to trust him," returned Mrs. Wyeth, "I myself don't know a greater fool than Roberts."

"Perhaps, then, I had better go myself; it is rather important," said Hamlin, meditatively, "that is, if I sha'n't crush Miss Wyeth's dress."

Sylvia said politely that there was plenty of room.

Pauline did not wait to see them depart. She went back to the blue and yellow drawing-room and sat down at the piano. "And this," she said to herself, "is what nine women out of ten welcome as love-making." She felt irritated and distressed. The post-office had been closed an hour.

She was still playing when he came back, and she was not surprised when he entered the room and looked about for a sponge with which to wipe out the memory of his late absence that he should seat himself beside her at once, though he had no special fondness for music.

Her hands dropped from the keys and she regarded him a moment in contemplation.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, incautiously.

"I was thinking," she answered, "how interesting the ostrich is, how praiseworthy the mole!"

And then, her words having a certain accidental rhythm, she went on improvising a chantlike accompaniment:

"How interesting the ostrich is—how praiseworthy the mole!
How diligent and innocent, and yet upon the whole
I'd not award to either one a heavenly aureole."

Hamlin chuckled so delightedly that she almost feared her meaning had passed him by, until he said:

"But a *mole*, I don't think I quite understand."

"A mole," Miss Gale returned, as one who says, "the world, my dear children is round"—"the mole is an animal who works under ground, without appreciating that his tracks are plainly visible to those above."

He flushed. She saw that the mere man would have left her instantly, had not the diplomat forced him to stay and make use of the readiest instrument of concealment.

"Let us go into the conservatory," he said, softly.

Miss Gale laid a finger on lips irresistibly curving.

"No, I think not," she said; "I think I detect a trace of moleishness in the proposal."

"I wish you would tell me what you mean."

"Do you know an Indian legend which says that at the beginning the monks were embroidering the stars in the neatest designs and constellations, when a rude coyotte, jumping into the midst, cried: 'Why all this trouble and embroidery?' and kicked over the table, scattering the stars to their present patternless positions. That's what I mean. Why all this trouble and embroidery?"

"I don't understand."

"You invite plain speaking?"

"I do."

"Why then, it puzzles an onlooker why an admiration for the prettiest, kindest child in the world should demand a concealment not too elaborate for a bank-robbery."

As she spoke the shadow described by Sylvia descended, as when on an autumn afternoon a cloud is suddenly blown across the sun. His voice had the tone of a passing bell as he answered:

"I am right to conceal it. I have a reason."

"And may I ask what?" Her tone seemed to lay a hand, mentally upon her hilt. At his answer there might be bloodshed.

"I am not sure. I never am," with a hopeless gesture of his drooped hands. "It seems so simple for other men, but for me there is always something wrong."

Miss Gale's blade rattled back in the scabbard. She addressed herself in the glass above the piano.

"And this is the sex that is commonly regarded as beasts of prey. Alas, poor lion trying to cultivate a taste for lambs. Poor eagle, longing to be a menace to dove-cotes!"

"You can't despise me more than I despise myself."

Her shoulders twitched very slightly upward. She jumped to her feet.

"I wish you good-night, Mr. Hamlin."

He caught the end of a scarf that floated from her shoulders.

"Don't leave me," he said. "You don't know what a hell you have set me in. Do you suppose I

want to be the sort of person I am? Do you suppose I am happy?"

"Happy? It seems as if you might be, young, free, heart-broken it would appear over no one. What do you need? Occupation? Why, man alive, is any art being fittingly patronized? Is the best music being heard? The best pictures seen? Why," she went on, his perfect stolidity working her up to fresh extravagance, "buy a theatre and produce the plays that the great stupid public won't pay to go and see. Kidnap the half dozen really pleasant social people you know, husbands without their wives, and wives without their husbands, people your sister visits and some she doesn't, and take them round the world on your yacht. Enjoy their wit on the slopes of Hecla, and their subtlety in the Vale of Cashmere. Happy—what do you lack?"

"The power to enjoy myself." He spoke quite simply, without any intention of being epigrammatic, and he left his opponent silent. She remembered the lament of a novelist concerning the absence in modern fiction of any convincing barrier

to lovers' unions—differences of religion, of station, even the will of stern parents being no longer operative. She saw now that the true obstacle of the future must be the incapacity of the hero to feel.

The tragedy, if cast on somewhat inconsiderable lines, was none the less a tragedy; she had only to look at the man to see that. There was something childlike in the way he stood holding the end of her scarf, dumbly appealing not to be left alone.

She sat down again, and they remained thus in silence for some twenty minutes. Then she rose and bade him good-night, this time more kindly.

"What train shall you take to-morrow?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"No. I think that intimacies that begin with a scene had better end there."

He took her decision in silence, and she went upstairs. A few minutes later she heard his bedroom door shut. He had not waited up for Sylvia.

CHAPTER V

AS Pauline entered the house on the afternoon of her return from the Wyeths' her eye was attracted by various unfamiliar objects on the hall table—a man's soft felt hat, a woman's short brown jacket, an imitation alligator bag, and, nearby, two pairs of overshoes. She knew at once what these betokened. Fred and Ada had come to spend the day.

The two were brother and sister, second cousins of Pauline. Fred, throughout his early youth, had, one cannot say loved Pauline, but had at least assumed the right of being jealous of anyone who did, and, although a dull young man, had had sense enough to take refuge in his cousinship whenever he found himself threatened as a lover. His opinion of himself was such as to enable him to take for granted that his position, not his person, was the bar to their union, and that if Pauline had had any taste for love in a cottage his would have been the cottage selected. As it was, he ad-

mitted, he was interested to know what future she would pick out as worthy of her, and was apt to be extremely satirical on the subject of any foreign nobleman who happened to be visiting the country.

Ada was some years older than Pauline. They had once been thought to resemble each other strongly, but life, poverty, and her own high sense of duty had worn upon Ada. She was frankly angular, while Pauline was slim. Her skin was sallow, a danger that Pauline avoided owing to the bright clearness of her color and the art with which she chose her clothes. There was, however, no question that anxiety, ill-health, a diminished income, and five years of life might easily land Pauline exactly where Ada was. She had always served Mrs. Crewe as the "terrible example" serves the temperance lecturer; specially, as to make the warning more forcible, Ada had had what was usually spoken of in the family as "an opportunity." This had presented itself under the guise of a rich thread manufacturer, who several years before had wanted to marry her. His habits were

bad, and his appearance unattractive, but Ada's relations (especially the more distant, whom it least concerned) seemed to regard her preference for teaching the rudiments of drawing merely as an example of self-esteem, which they unhesitatingly condemned. Pauline felt a passionate sympathy for her cousin, not wholly unselfish.

As she entered the drawing-room she took in the situation at a glance. Mrs. Crewe looked worn. Pauline knew that she had begun by being very pleasant and kind, but now had nothing but kindness left, as the fixed benevolence of her silence attested. She was incapable of sustaining this sort of strain. The whole thing struck Pauline as inexpressibly pitiful. Pitiful that Mrs. Crewe could make nothing better out of it, pitiful that Fred should think it necessary to look quite so completely at ease, pitiful even that Ada's waist and skirt did not quite meet. (Pauline's glance took in from the doorway the little white line between the two.) For an instant she would have gone to the stake to make them happy.

And make them happy she did during the few

minutes that remained of their stay. She did not ask after their health, nor how Fred was getting on in his profession—questions which she felt sure had stood Mrs. Crewe in good stead throughout the day. But she suffered Fred's slyness about a Russian prince whom she had never even seen; and when Ada (who considered the act of writing poetry inseparable from loosened locks, pale brows, and midnight oil) inquired after the "muse," she replied, as was desired, by anecdotes of the literary world. They went away in good spirits.

When they were gone Mrs. Crewe sank back in her chair and looked up at her granddaughter.

"Since ten this morning, my dear!" she said.

"Louisa Crewe," said Pauline, "you are a wicked woman. Doesn't it strike you as at all pathetic that they should think it a pleasure to come all this way in hot, dusty trains for the sake of spending a few hours with an old lady who so evidently reduces her ideas to a sort of one-syllable pap for their consumption?"

"A pleasure, my dear! The idea never occurred to me. It is, I think, a duty—Ada has such a

strong sense of duty—to come once a year to pay their respects to me. Though, of course, they may like to see you. You are wonderfully agreeable at times, like your mother, only she had not your gifts. I observed you with admiration. You could not have exerted yourself more for a king."

"I object to the word exerted," said Pauline; "I did not exert myself. A spontaneous desire to please broke out in me the instant I beheld the patient resolution of your countenance, as if you would do anything in the world for them if only they would go away and leave you to read your book. I believe, in the conflict between pity and a wish to get rid of them, you would presently have offered them something material, in the fever of a disease which I should diagnose as suppressed kindness of the heart."

"I should like to do something for them," Mrs. Crewe admitted; "Ada is so forlorn—so forlorn." She shook her head.

"She is very like me," said Pauline, with her eyes on the glass.

"Only, of course, dear, you could not teach

drawing," returned her grandmother, gently. She never missed an opportunity, and now, as Pauline did not immediately answer, she decided to score again. "How the poor thing must regret the thread-man!"

"And why in the world should she regret that vulgar person?" asked Pauline, crossly. It was not the process of being led another step in the right direction that irritated her. To these constant lessons she was used, but she thought her cousin might be allowed to adjust her life to suit herself. "Regret! Why should she, when she refused him under just the same conditions as the present?"

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Crewe, still temperate. "She was five years younger, you know." Then, as if she had done as much as possible with the incident, she laid it aside. "Did you have a pleasant time at the Wyeths'?"

"Not too pleasant, Louisa. Staying away from home is a dangerous experiment. You leave off all your own little habits, and it is somewhat appalling sometimes to find how little is left. Besides, no one is as delightful a companion as you are. I

don't know why I ever go away from you, and I care less and less for chrome yellow and light blue, and my bedstead was a fine old colonial piece, lately repolished and decorated, by some original, with brass Empire sphinxes, and there were no shutters to my windows. How can anyone sleep without shutters? I have waked up every morning since I went away at sunrise——"

"What a fuss you are, Pauline! At your age you should not mind such things. If you keep on like this you will be a thorough old maid at thirty."

"But, Louisa, it is not becoming to wake up at sunrise. And Aunt Minnie is dreadfully disappointed that the millionaire and I are not more attracted mutually, and I am disgusted to observe that he is doing his best to make Sylvia sophisticated; and that's a crime."

"Ah, the millionaire," said Mrs. Crewe. "What did you think of that much-talked-of person?" Because she had chosen to discourage Minnie Wyeth's injudicious suggestions she had none the less held them almost constantly in her mind during Pauline's absence.

"Why, let me see," said the girl. She leant back, with her hands behind her head, and smiled discriminatingly, her eyes on the ceiling. "It would really be something of an achievement to give you an adequate idea of him. He is a gentleman, and a very pretty horseman, withering, unfortunately, under a too exhaustive study of himself by himself. You know the type. A genius at discovering his moods, and a dunce at accounting for them. An apostle of detail, charming, indeed attaching to such an extent that, though he is not really good-looking, you begin to think him so, and so appealing that, though you condemn his faults, you would not have him altered for the world."

Mrs. Crewe found herself a little confused, and, with the object of clearing matters, said:

"And he is in love with Sylvia?"

"In love! Oh, Louisa, with what levity you step into these regions of perpetual fog. He is not in love with Sylvia, or anyone else. He never has been, but he is still hopeful. The world at large, and Aunt Minnie in particular, are fond of describing him as flirtatious. Nothing could be more

unjust. He is actuated by an earnest desire to be carried off his feet by a real emotion, and he gives himself every chance. He wants to fall in love, and each time that he fails he is quite as distressed as the lady. He is a kind person, and her peace of mind is just as important as his own to him, and this is saying a good deal. One weakness, I must admit, I detected. He suffers from a love of intrigue planted, unfortunately, in a nature essentially moral. At first you are tempted to think there must be something very sinister behind so much diplomacy, but there isn't. He is all concealment and nothing to conceal. His skill outdoes his emotion. Of course one must not ask why all this manœuvring. Why is a cat incapable of walking across the centre of a room, but must needs go sidling along against the furniture? I myself never object to a man's sidling. It does no harm and gives him a feeling of inscrutability. For Mr. Hamlin it does much more. It gives him the greatest trouble and enjoyment. He has the most striking aptitude for indirection. He can contrive and arrange and parry and thrust and pull wires,

but I am sure that when he has at last succeeded in getting the object of his attention alone he finds he has nothing of striking importance to say to her; and this not with the design of annoying, not from inherent naughtiness of disposition, but simply because his mind changes. He has not very much feeling, and the little he has exhausts itself in attaining a situation—there is none left to develop it."

"Upon my word, my dear," said Mrs. Crewe, rousing herself, like the old campaigner she was, "this sounds interesting. What the man needs is management."

"Needs it!" Pauline exclaimed, "he actually cries for it. Oh, Louisa, Louisa, if all men could be divided into two classes (which division would not include quite all the sex, thank Heaven), those who love us for making it easy for them, and those who love us for making it hard, I should say that this man was one of the most perfect examples of the latter type that it has so far been my fate to meet. A great deal has been said about men's being governable by flattery, but a man like that could

be wound round any woman's finger by means of a few able-bodied obstacles."

"Your exposition is so complete I feel sure I could add nothing to it, and yet for my own sake I should be curious to see the gentleman."

"It is a pleasure I could not give you, Louisa. He wanted to come to see me, but I thought it better not to let him. Some woman is going to cut short poor Sylvia's romance, but I prefer that it should not be I." Mrs. Crewe's countenance betrayed nothing, nor her speech, as she said, without special interest:

"Perhaps you were right." In her heart, however, she smiled contentedly, and said to herself: "Able-bodied obstacle number one." It was an old game. She had seen Pauline play it before. She herself had played once upon a time.

In the course of the next few weeks, however, as day after day went past, she began to wonder whether men lent themselves as easily to such treatment as they had in her day.

Pauline herself, if the truth had been known, felt some surprise that Hamlin had taken his dis-

missal so docilely, sincere as she had been in giving it. She thought him, for all her scorn, an endearing person, and she was conscious of a wish to see him again, a wish she had sacrificed without hesitation to her regard for Sylvia. But now it appeared that Sylvia had seen no more of him than her cousin. Pauline discovered this from Mrs. Wyeth, who for some time kept dropping in at unexpected hours in order to discover whether Hamlin were spending his leisure with her kinswomen. She was heartily surprised and disappointed to find that he was not. She could only surmise that, having at length bought the property in the woods, his time was taken up with architects and landscape gardeners.

One morning near Christmas, Pauline was taking a brief walk in the park. It was a crisp, yet temperate winter's day. Suddenly, as she was threading her way among the fat, happy babies which infested her path, she almost ran against the figure of a man who, with his hands in his pockets, reflection visible in every line of his countenance, was watching a gray horse driven up

and down before him in a runabout. It was Hamlin.

Pauline underwent a distinct emotion. Once for a few minutes she had been intimate with this man's inmost life, a brief mental familiarity had existed between them. She wondered, in recognition of this fact, how he would now bear himself.

"It is a funny thing," he began, raising his hat, but without turning his eyes from the horse, "it is a funny thing, considering how much I have been about horses all my life, what a time it takes me to make up my mind which leg he is tender on. Should you say the nigh fore?"

Pauline replied, without apparent consideration, that she could not see that he was lame at all, and as at this Hamlin at once became absorbed in the matter afresh, she continued on her way without further ceremony.

She had only gone a few steps, however, when she heard footsteps running behind her, and he joined her.

He looked triumphant. "It *is* the nigh fore,"

he said, in a tone of satisfaction that reproved her languid interest. "May I drive you home?"

Pauline said, civilly, that she was much obliged, but she preferred to walk. With a somewhat similar request on his part their last interview had ended, but his own words seemed to awaken no recollection of the dramatic on Hamlin's part. He said at once that he would walk, too, and proceeded to beguile her way by an account of his experiences with builders and architects. Somehow, by his simple telling in his wonderful voice, the thing became interesting, even the description of the new heating apparatus which he was putting in, and which, if he had not invented, he had certainly improved. Pauline expressed herself as seeing no reason why it should not be a great success. She could not decide whether strategy or indifference was suggesting to him to talk to her as if she were an intelligent young plumber. But on her own steps she allowed herself the luxury of holding out her hand and saying, in a tone that admitted of but one answer, "You won't come in?"

She did not know Hamlin. He hesitated. He did

not like to keep the horse standing, especially. He entered into a detailed account of the nature of its lameness. She looked at him in wonder, remembering that she knew him in many respects to be a subtle person. When, however, she found him on the point of sending the horse back to the stable, she interposed:

"After all," she said, "I won't ask you to come in. My grandmother and I are about to set forth on an errand of serious importance." As she spoke she smiled with sufficient meaning to give him an excuse for asking what this was.

"We are bound," she returned, gravely, "on the selection of a dress."

Hamlin was thoughtfully attentive. "What kind of a dress?" he asked.

"Ah, if I only knew! An evening dress. It must be so elaborate that when I dine with my neighbors on a rainy night they will not doubt I have done them honor with my best clothes, and yet too simple to flatter unduly a single guest at home. It must be sufficiently surprising to delight my own friends without being so frivolous as to an-

tagonize my grandmother's. It must be the perfection of fashion, and yet wholly individual. In short, you see, my dear Mr. Hamlin, that one of the problems of the century is before me."

Hamlin was silent an instant, then he said:

"I should get black and white, I think."

Pauline saw at once that he was right. Black and white was, of course, the solution.

"And so I will," she said.

And now a complication arose, owing to the fact that the man who answered the door informed her that Mrs. Crewe had gone out without leaving any message.

Hamlin insisted that she should take him in her grandmother's place.

"You see," he said, "the shops will be crowded, and I have often noticed that the shopwomen will pay attention to a woman if she has a man with her (especially if he looks as if it were his expedition), when they would not notice her at all if she were alone."

"You open a new profession to your sex," Pauline answered. " 'A gentleman of commanding ap-

pearance will devote the mornings to ladies' shopping. Saleswomen's attention guaranteed within three minutes of entering shop. Extra charge for advice on purchases. N.B. No bundles carried.' "

To dam stagnant water is usually considered unnecessary, and to throw obstacles in the way of so static a gentleman would have been plainly fatuous. She accepted his escort without opposition.

His theory was fully carried out by facts. Pauline found herself at once swept to the counter and fixed by the eye of a generally bronze-colored young woman, while patient old ladies and aggressive dressmakers' slavies clamored unnoticed behind her.

So successful were they in giving the impression of Hamlin's leadership (fortunately they met none of their acquaintances) that Pauline found it necessary to convey through him her requests that the striped silk should be brought back, or the flowered unfolded, before the priestess behind the counter would deign to consider herself addressed. The pride of this lady was in part accounted for

by the superlative refinement of her diction, which demanded the free play not of lips alone, but of eyes and even of eyebrows—the word drapery alone in her mouth being a whole lesson in elocution. This, as they departed, Hamlin occupied himself in a vain effort to imitate. They came out giggling like two children.

Not until they were again in the street did he remember that he had shortly an important engagement with his architect.

The occasion was too hurried for words. Hamlin dived for his watch. "Well," he said, his thumb on the dial assisting his calculations, "the question is, can I catch my train? I used to be able to do it in just fifteen minutes from the next corner—that leaves me ten seconds. Do you suppose I can get to the next corner in ten seconds?"

"Perhaps, if you run," Pauline returned, flurriedly, and he darted away. Scarcely, however, was he gone when she was startled to hear his voice again beside her.

"I remembered my watch was forty seconds slow," he said, "so, you see, there was no use."

Thus they remained together another half hour or so, and so impersonal was the nature of their converse that Pauline never thought of her scruples, until, at parting, he asked her a question which women are prone to regard as a sign-post.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

A friend is content to trust to his mood to bring him and his luck to find you in. A lover, even one tolerably ardent, may hesitate in the plenitude of his engagements to bind himself to one which, however pleasant, is practically unbreakable, but the man who pleads to be so bound is in a fair way to the condition of existing meagrely in your absence on the recollection of your last meeting and the anticipation of your next. He admits no greater pleasure is likely to offer.

"You must come to dine some evening when the dress is finished," she said, pleasantly, aware of the length of time she indicated.

"To-morrow at six," he answered.

The next day at six she was drinking tea with a neighbor.

CHAPTER VI

A FEW days later he came with better success, and after this she saw him constantly. Almost before she realized how often he was in her company she became aware that her little world had arranged the whole matter to its satisfaction, had decided that this was perfectly suitable, had married them, and settled down again, with such certainty that the announcement of her engagement would scarcely have created a ripple, so much would it have been a matter of course.

Pauline should have been very much flattered at this estimate of her worth, for Hamlin was an important person. To his more obviously commendable qualities he added that of being something of a novelty. Since he had left college he had been abroad, and then for several years in mourning, so that he had the value of a new discovery, and it appeared he had several discoverers.

Mrs. Crewe at once admitted him to her intimacy, and humored and petted him. Pauline

would have found a bitter satisfaction in believing that her grandmother's attitude was not wholly disinterested, but this she could not do. The place he took was too evidently his own. The old lady did not pay him the compliment of battle which she had paid to Rapier, but she responded to Hamlin's appeals for help in such matters as his inventory and his linen-closet. While admitting him to be the least stimulating of minds, she became distinctly attached to him. Here was too logical an effect of the two men's natures on such a person as Mrs. Crewe for Pauline to be able to doubt.

All this was very pleasant. He was the most thoughtful of friends. Pauline heard rumors of larger generosity, which, if mentioned, reduced him to the quiescence of shyness. For so constant a visitor he left wonderfully undisturbed the placidity of the two ladies' daily life. He was perfectly content to sit of a morning while Mrs. Crewe knitted and Pauline went in and out, as the fancy took her. She had no objection to people's wondering whether she meant to marry him or not (she sometimes wondered herself), as long as there

seemed no likelihood of the choice being offered to her. Of course, very early in their intercourse, he began to make love to her in his own gentle, irresolute way, but, knowing him as well as she did, she was justified in believing that he would never go any farther. She was quite aware that the idea of asking her to marry him was often in his mind, but she soothed herself by saying, for him, this was no nearer to proposing than if they had not yet met. Although he displayed the ingenuity of a lover in contriving, under the most unfavorable circumstances, to see her almost every day, to appear wherever she was, if for nothing more satisfactory than to bid her good-night, he nevertheless surprised her quite as often by failing to keep the simplest appointment. It was not very difficult to suspect that it was more the contrivance than the result he valued. Though in such material matters as flowers and books his memory and his taste seemed alike infallible, she was inclined to think that he regarded such attentions as mere courtesy, the due of charm, that he had in fact learned so perfectly the art of giving pleasure to

women that he almost failed in the attainment of his object. Though, since early in their acquaintance, he had been intimating by every circumlocution in the English language that he adored her, he quite as often, in another vein, invited her sympathy over the fact that he was incapable of loving anyone. All these contradictions she had been disposed at first to look upon as a crowning impertinence of strategy, but she soon saw that he pursued no more offensive policy than that of yielding to the impulse of the moment.

She sustained for him, in fact, a dual character, as audience and leading lady, as confidante and lady-love. In her former rôle he told her, in moments of expansiveness, that he believed he would be much happier married, but that he had never asked any woman to be his wife, dared not until he found one who, like a female St. George, would be able to vanquish that multiform dragon, his moods. How, he would say, could an honorable man reconcile it to his conscience to swear at the altar to love a woman forever when his past experience assured him he might at any moment sink

into a slough of indifference which would for the time being prevent his loving anyone. Again, inviting her to another part, he would employ, in order to convince her of his love, the whole vocabulary of sentimentalism—that large, hazy idiom built largely upon variations of the question, "Can you imagine why?"

There never was a courtship, if courtship this could be called, at once so ingenious and so cold; so rich in situation and so lacking in emotion. A passion, if a reckless, is at least a consistent guide, and may be made to appear a very mirror of logic beside a wavering sentimental affection.

Nor did he monopolize the inconsistencies of the situation. The gentleman was no more variable in nature than the lady was inconstant in design. The policy of not letting your left hand know what your right is doing is open to the single objection that the two members may adopt diametrically opposite lines of action—the one administering telling blows, while the other caresses the victim. Pauline's conduct might have confused a cleverer man.

She liked him sincerely, if a trifle patronizingly, but she knew that between them a great gulf was fixed, a gulf which only she crossed on a bridge made of her more communicable characteristics. She had no intention of marrying him, yet she would have liked dearly to show him that if she wanted to she could. She offered him, it is true, from time to time the most stunning discouragements, but did she entirely forget her exposition on the value of obstacles?

Her own particular goblin, the phantom of the future, shrieked nightly at her bedside that now at last she held the spell to exorcise it forever, and she still answered that she would not knock her soul on the head for the sake of the most haunting demon in Saturnalia. This meant that the right to remember Rapier was as yet more valuable than a certified future.

This sort of thing had been going on for a month or so, when, one afternoon about six, Hamlin was announced. He was to take her to supper that very night at a certain ball. He did not often

go to balls, and had made a special point of being allowed the privilege of her company at this one. She was a little surprised to hear, therefore, that he was now in the drawing-room.

His air was so gently melancholy that he had no need of verbal flatteries as he said:

"I have to go away to-night—to be in Chicago on Wednesday."

"Dear, dear," returned Pauline, "this is very sudden."

He shook his head. "Not to me," he said; "I have known it for three weeks, only I forgot it. I hate going. I can't take you to supper."

"Shall you be gone long?"

His manner became more candid.

"I am not sure. I need only be a day in Chicago, just for a meeting, but I may go on to St. Paul. I have friends there, and I am very fond of winter sports."

"You are very fond of so many things."

"And people?" he suggested.

"And rather fond of some people."

"I could be very fond if they would let me."

"Dear me," thought Pauline, "I had supposed I had exhausted the possibilities of this style of conversation at seventeen." Aloud she answered, no less adequately: "Very fond perhaps *because* they won't let you."

"I wonder who will be so happy as to take you to supper."

"Why," said Pauline, "if you wonder very much, I will tell you. Herman Crisp will."

Hamlin smiled. "How do you know he will want to?"

"He said so."

"He may have asked someone else since then."

"Hardly, for I accepted his invitation."

Hamlin's playfulness disappeared. "But you promised me," he exclaimed.

"But he would never have known that."

"It was the only reason I was going to the ball at all."

"And now you are going to Chicago."

"I can't help that."

"Of course not."

"I hate you to treat me like this," he broke out, almost with passion, "as if I were not to be depended on."

"Let us say that I recognize the probability of other claims upon your time."

This did not please him any better. He said, in a low voice of displeasure: "It was the merest accident that I had to go away."

"And perhaps it is the merest accident that I have doubly entrenched myself for the evening."

After a pause, he remarked: "I should like to know how you would have managed if I hadn't gone."

"If you had not gone you would never have imagined that I *was* managing."

He turned on her seriously. "When you torment me like this," he said, "I sometimes think that I shall go away for good."

"Doubtless at a distance I should be quite innocuous."

He met her eye and smiled reluctantly. He thought it very keen in her to know that the

longer he stayed away from her the more completely did she occupy his attention.

"Aren't you at all sorry about this evening?" he asked, plaintively.

She nodded. At which he took her hand, sighed, kissed it, and left her.

The ball, which was at a private house, and was called by its giver a "small dance," in deference to a few millions who were not asked, was very large and very pleasant. Perhaps, however, the people who enjoyed it most were those who, old enough to admit they were too old to dance, took their places in a gallery above the ball-room and gossiped about those who still did.

Among this number was Hamlin's sister, a lady much his senior. She was whispering into the ear of an elderly gentleman.

"That is what makes it so dangerous for a stranger to try to entertain in a city like New York," she was saying. "I know for a fact she sent a man into dinner with his divorced wife, not two weeks ago, and when I asked her about it, what do you think she said? That, as they could not

have met for ten years, they must have had plenty to——"

"I beg your pardon, but who is the young woman in scarlet who has just come in?"

"Miss Gale, the poetess. You don't know? Oh, don't apologize to me. I never read verse, but my eldest boy, Charlie, the one who plays the violin, you know, thinks everything she writes very fine. Should you judge from her costume and her position that she has no shrinking from being conspicuous?"

"My dear lady, I never saw such a skin. Is it my old eyes, or does it actually reflect the light. If I were a younger man, she would turn my head."

"Oh, but she never wastes time turning the heads of ordinary mortals. If she is flirtatious she never allows it to interfere with her main object. She is old Mrs. Crewe's granddaughter. Well, what could you expect but that the girl should be worldly. I really wonder she has not married before. Beauty usually goes such a distance with men! They care for nothing else. Just at present, I must tell you,

23902

my brother has been so fortunate as to excite her interest—at least so I gather from the number of times he lunches and dines there, and of course I only know the times he *goes*. How often he is asked—— However I never knew a person better able to take care of himself. I only wish he would marry——"

"Oh, see! She has dropped the rose out of her hair, and that young booby—your son! Ten thousand pardons, but really it was slow of him to let her pick it up herself."

Pauline did not seem to be enjoying herself the less because Hamlin had been summoned to Chicago. She was fond of dancing and she practised it as an art.

At supper Crisp was in high spirits, and was pleased to be both fanciful and confidential. He wanted her to know every detail of a controversy he had just been engaged in with a lady who had refused to accept a portrait he had just finished, declining, she said, to go down to posterity looking like a wicked white rat. This determination led to a correspondence, during which they became so

impressed with each other's epistolary style that they had ended by becoming the warmest friends.

This recitation had taken him the better part of supper, and he had brought her back to the ballroom, where people had already begun to dance again, before he said, without the slightest warning:

"I suppose you know that Michael has been ill?"

"Ill! No! Seriously." Her wide-opened eyes studied him with terror.

"He did not die, if that is what you mean. He came extremely near it."

"Herman! What was it?"

"What is it always for a Northerner in those pestilential climates?"

"You are quite wrong. The climate is not unhealthy. Michael himself has told me so repeatedly. It is cool and delicious."

"Of course you believed him. It is so easy to believe agreeable description. Not unhealthy! That is so like Michael. Did he tell you that everyone lives on quinine, that for six months in the year yellow fever is endemic, that twenty years ago the

whole country was depopulated by cholera, that typhoid is as common there as a cold in the head is in this accursed winter of ours? What he meant was that a man of temperate habits had a fair chance to pull through."

"You are exaggerating, Herman, I know by the justice of your manner. Nevertheless, he must not be allowed to stay in such a place."

Even as she spoke, she perceived that Hamlin had entered the ballroom, and was now approaching her, yet so little of her mind was at his disposal that she did not even feel surprise that he was not now on his way to Chicago. Her only idea was to extract as much information as possible from Crisp, before the other carried out his evident intention of asking her to dance.

Crisp saw him at the same instant.

"Ah," he said, grimly, "here comes the gentleman, whom, I am told on all sides, you are about to marry."

"I am not," returned Pauline, fiercely, and she had never felt more keenly the impossibility of such a step.

If she expected to meet with approbation, she was disappointed.

"And in Heaven's name, why not?" said Crisp. "What more do you want? Is not his just what you have been waiting for. Why did you send Michael away if you are not going to profit by his absence? Don't suppose that you are doing him any favor by remaining single. On the contrary. For God's sake marry this commendable Philistine, and then let us have Michael back, the sooner the better."

"I don't know what you mean, Herman."

Crisp smiled. "You said yourself, didn't you, that he could not stay in such a place."

"Will you dance with me, Miss Gale?"

Hamlin was standing before her. She turned quickly to Crisp to furnish her with an excuse for refusing, but he was already on his feet, wishing her good-night. A minute later she and Hamlin were waltzing together. They stopped only with the music. Then he drew her arm within his and led her away to the farthest, most fragrant corner of the conservatory. This move, she felt, was based on caution as much as on a desire for privacy, for is

not a ball the very birthplace of social strategy, especially when the gentleman is conspicuous by his position, and the lady has chosen to array herself like a flamingo? She leaned back, resting her arms on her scarlet lap. The steam was thick on the glass sides of the conservatory. It must be very cold. How hard to realize that in some countries——

When her thoughts returned to her companion, she became aware that he was looking at her intensely in the dim light.

"So you missed your train to Chicago?" she suggested.

"I did not try to catch it. You knew I would not go. I should not have come," he said, "if I had known you meant to be so lovely and so kind—to other men."

His voice, so suggestive that he had no need of even the slight gesticulation that the Anglo-Saxon allows himself, swayed Pauline. It thrilled her often by its mere tone, irrespective of his words. To-night, full as her mind was of another man, she could almost have yielded to its charm. She

looked at him, saying nothing. He sat down beside her and gently and appealingly took possession of her hand.

"I came to-night," he said, "because I wanted to be near you, and now I have you near me I want—more. I'm afraid I am always going on wanting more, Pauline."

"I'm sure you wrong your powers of variety," she answered lightly, but her hand remained in his.

She had grown accustomed to watching his hovering on the verge of the precipice. At first, she had been alarmed at the apparent imminence of a declaration that would force her to announce a decision she had not yet found herself able to make; but as time went on she became able to admire the dexterity with which he could balance on the brink, and to derive some excitement from alternately pushing him almost over and pulling him back.

"Ah, you needn't pretend to think me fickle," he said, and smiled as if the accusation would not be so wholly unjust in spite of his protest. "You know very well I have lost the power—it *is* a power you know, since—since when do you suppose?"

Silence.

"Won't you ask me," reproachfully, "or do you know so well without being told?"

And now, if comedy may be said to exist where no one has time to observe it, there was something comic in his question, "Can you guess what I have brought you here to listen to?" As if a would-be swimmer who has stood conspicuously shivering on the brink should ask: Can you imagine the amusement I have planned for myself?

Pauline's eyes answered if her lips did not, and yet the next instant she heard, with a shock of surprise, that he had taken the plunge and was saying: "Pauline, I love." He would have said more, words, probably able words, did not fail him, but she interrupted:

"That you of all men should fall into such a mistake!"

At this the key was changed. Hamlin had imagined, had indeed intended his proposal to be of a hot and hasty nature as more accordant with his sense of fitness and his lady's worth, but his own state of mind had for him an intense psychological

interest and he could not resist the temptation of discussing it with as competent a critic as, under his tuition, Pauline had become.

"Yes, I love you," he returned, slowly, as if, though her doubt was not unnatural, his decision was final. "The only reason why I have hesitated—well, I have hesitated, you know—was because I was waiting to feel as no one ever did after eighteen, or out of a book."

"In fact, in the only way in which I should wish to be loved."

"What!" with tolerance, "like a boy?"

She nodded. "The enthusiasm of eighteen, the intelligence of forty."

Hamlin smiled wisely and shook his head. "I'm afraid you never will be," he said.

"Oh, forgive me, I am, and will consider nothing less."

He looked surprised and puzzled. "You mean by me?"

"Hardly." She laughed. "You see I am contending that you do not love me at all. You don't begin to know, or to want to know what I am. It is my

treatment of you you love, any woman as difficult would be as dear."

"But," his hesitation admitted a germ of truth in her remark—"but I have never asked any other woman to marry me."

"There have been times—there will be times again when you are as indifferent to me as to a stone upon the road."

Hamlin paused, determined not to sacrifice accuracy. "At least," he said "I have never found you in the least repellent."

Pauline was sufficiently large-minded to anticipate the explanation that the sound of these words suggested to him. "I know," he said, "that is more than you have been able to say before. Well, you see I should require even more."

"But there is more—a great deal more. You talk as if I had no feeling at all. If I've seemed rather indifferent for a man in love, since I've been building, why, all I can say is——"

"That not many men in love are as much interested in building as you are."

"Well, it is absorbing," returned Hamlin, and

looked so pensive that she supposed his mind had glided away to beams and rafters, but she wronged him.

"I don't know exactly how to say what I mean," he began with a faint apologetic smile, "but you know I'm not the sort of person to do a thing like this overhastily." (Pauline assented.) "Well, all I mean is," he ended in a burst, "if I wasn't perfectly sure myself, I'd never ask you to marry me—never in the world."

"Oh, I understand you have convinced yourself, but for all that you may be mistaken, and you see the difficulty is that the more impossible I am, the more mistaken you will become."

"Then don't be impossible—darling," he suggested, as a slightly experimental afterthought.

"How can I help it?" Pauline answered, almost wistfully. "Don't you feel that we might just as well have lived in different countries at different periods for all our understanding of each other. Nine-tenths of the most important part of my life doesn't touch you and never could, and I dare say the same could be said of yours. The truth is you

don't come within the circle of my emotions at all."

As if in proof of the truth of her words, it now appeared that they so little appealed to Hamlin's sense of reality that they did not even hold his attention.

"I tell you what," he said, "marry me, and I will take the responsibility; I'll make you care."

At this they were so far apart that Pauline's heart sank. She did not even see the comedy of his manner.

"And by what methods?" she burst out. "Having failed when I was free you think you will succeed when I am bound hand and foot? The marriage ceremony will exercise a charm? You would not take such a risk with your own feelings, and yet you haven't the faintest notion how I could hate—with what madness I could hate you and myself if—" She stopped, fearing that her warmth might betray the fact that she was in conflict with herself more than with him, and added, calmly: "You have been frank, so will I be. You have been on the point, let us say some dozen times before,

of asking me to marry you; well, perhaps on half of those occasions, I have been ready to accept you, but not because I loved you."

"On account of money?"

She nodded.

"I tell you this not to be brutal, but to make my refusal final."

"Oh," he said, buoyantly, "I don't give up hope so easily."

She was wonderingly silent, blaming her own sex less than ever before for the unsuccessful marriages of the world.

CHAPTER VII

NOT until she had refused Hamlin did Pauline appreciate how near she had come to accepting him, or, to be accurate, how familiar the idea of being his wife had become. When possibilities more disagreeable presented themselves, she could tell herself that this at least was left to her. This refuge of the imagination she missed. She missed, too, his company. No one could see much of Hamlin without being intimate with him; he at once became involved in one's everyday life. Pauline found her everyday life distinctly less easy without him. He must, she supposed, have occupied a great deal of her time, since so much of it was now on her hands.

She had feared some comment from Mrs. Crewe, who, after years of observation was probably fully alive to the situation. She was relieved to find the old lady politely oblivious. Fortunately she did not appreciate that in Mrs. Crewe's opinion, to refuse

a man was only the first step toward accepting him.

Such was the position of affairs, when, one evening in February, Pauline attended one of the meetings of "The Nucleus." This, as its name suggests, was an association of a few people—there happened to be eight in all—who had originally banded themselves together with the modest design of organizing a society which should be the stimulating, graceful, distinguished body in which we should all like to move. But whether in recognition of the unattainable quality of their aims, or in complete self-satisfaction, the Nucleus had never made the slightest effort to justify its name by including a single other person in its number. Its not inconsiderable dues were expended for no higher purpose than in providing twice a year a dinner. It had only one rule: That until rung for no servant was allowed to come into the dining-room to serve or remove dishes, thus interrupting conversation, disturbing the resting elbows of combatants haranguing each other across the table. Evidently there were disadvantages. On one occasion when

Crisp and Rapier had been discussing the Realist-Romanticist nomenclature (Rapier contending that there was no such division, and Crisp contradicting him on the ground that he himself was a realist, and Rapier an ass), everyone had taken sides, and it is on record that, to the agony of the cook, an hour and ten minutes had elapsed between soup and fish.

The meeting on the evening in question was held at the apartment of the only married member, Mrs. Converse, once better known as Miss Lucinda Lafrère. She was a young Louisianian who had started upon a dramatic career with unusual prospects of success. Some critics, not the least severe, had prophesied greatness for her. But unfortunately for art if not for her, a few steps from the starting-point she had met and loved a young journalist, now dignified by the title of playwright, who, having married her, sternly removed her to private life. She was in the habit of asserting that her profession had never been anything but a financial necessity and that any woman of sense preferred to be supported, instead of being obliged to

work for her living, but an occasional outbreak against her late rivals suggested a living desire to measure herself against them.

Mrs. Converse's apartment was at the top of a high building, so high that shutters were not a necessity in order to obtain privacy. Pauline pushed back the curtains, and looked out. The town below looked like a map outlined in electricity; here and there a great blotch of light marked a theatre or an hotel; the trolleys crawled along like illuminated beetles. The sound of the streets came faintly, but the occasional hoarse whistles of the boats were startlingly clear. Pauline's eyes turned to the wide, dark streak that was the river, remembering how, almost a year before, she and Michael had stood together on one of those boats, that now looked like a mere collection of fiery points floating crookedly down the current.

Mrs. Burton and Crisp had already arrived. The latter was occupying the hearth-rug and the conversation.

"——yesterday he came into the studio—old Holmes, you know, Pauline—and began going

on about an artist having no right to shut himself up, and that if I were going to paint these people I ought to know something of their daily lives; 'and so I do,' I said, 'for I know blamed well they are not in any way original, and what I don't know the daily papers supply, if I ever read them. But if you mean going to their parties, no. I get as good food at a restaurant, and better talk with the waiters. I saw that ten years ago.' But that did not please him at all. He said I was narrow and provincial, and I must dine with his sister that very evening—a dinner of twenty-four. As if in the whole world you could find twenty-four people who were really congenial. 'Even if it does not amuse you,' he said, 'you owe something to your art.' Well, I paid it. I went. This much I will say, I don't believe anywhere in the world you would run across six handsomer women. How do you do, Holmes, I'm telling them about that dinner. Well, in the dining-room there were two tapestries. And, upon my word, an artistic treat almost took away my capacity for more material nourishment, and that would have been a pity, for

the food was good, very good. They were something really unusual. I said this by way of a beginning to the lady I took in—the Muse of tragedy, divorced from any suggestion of her comic sister. 'Oh, do you like them,' she said, 'the cross-eyed lady, and the knight with the stiff neck? now the fire-screen *is* rather pretty.' I looked at the fire-screen, and O, my God, it was worsted work!"

Crisp shut his eyes, comatose at the recollection, but seeing that Holmes was about to snatch the reins of conversation from him, he sprang hastily to life again, and continued: "I had scarcely recovered my senses when she began to tell me how much interested she was in literary people—was something in that line herself. 'You write?' said I. Oh, dear, no, nothing so commercial, she *read*. Did that differentiate her from her friends? Oh, don't ask me. If so, Heaven have mercy on the friends. She read and studied. At the present time she is attending the most *interesting* class." (Crisp was something of a mimic. Even those who did not know the lady got a hint of her high seriousness of manner.) "The typical men of all countries, and who do you think

they are? Buddha, Socrates, Confucius, Omar, Dante—their life work and philosophy, you understand—and I can't remember how many others. 'You must have a wonder to give the course,' I said. And so they had. 'Oh, such a noble woman, Mr. Crisp. Her family lost all their money and she struggled for years at fancy-work and cooking-lessons, and then she thought of this—culture classes she called them, only of course we told her that the name wouldn't do. Culture is such a dreadful word, don't you think, Mr. Crisp. But it is so nice—you have no idea. She looks up all the references for us, and tells us what is in the books when we haven't time to read them, and dear me, how little time one has. But some serious work is a necessity to me.' Oh, it is funny; laugh, by all means, but what does it all mean. These are the people who ought to be well educated, and they don't know enough to appreciate their own possessions. They ought to command the cleverest society in the country and they can't get on with anyone but fools, and only their own particular brand of those."

Actual lack of breath made Crisp pause, and Pauline protested: "Oh, come, Herman; you generalize too liberally. This was an unusually unfortunate experience. There are women——"

"I feel with Crisp," said Holmes, the politician. "There is not a woman in this city who has a social position of any real importance. Take any big man from the other side, political, scientific, literary. Do you suppose if I felt responsible for his entertainment I should take him to Newport or among the same people here? If he were curious, I'd give him a glimpse of them, and of Chinatown, and Mulberry Bend, but those aren't the houses, in general, that I should take him to for conversation. Why, last year when Commings was here I made my sister ask him to lunch." (Mr. Holmes's sister, very young, very beautiful, very well born, had just married a man of great riches, thereby so firing the imagination of the whole country that her comings and goings and jewels and clothes were recorded by the newspapers as if she were royalty.) "I knew she wouldn't know anything about the scene of the House of Commons, but I hoped she

might feel some interest in his relationship to the Marquis of Dunston. But, no. Throughout his entire visit, she sat in a corner with her dearest girl friend, giggling and whispering about where she had got a new ring. It's all very innocent, but that isn't one's idea of a woman of the world. I tell you that money as a career has not been conceived of by woman in this country."

A certain tremor ran through Pauline at these words. Holmes had great weight with her, as he had with all women and most men.

He was an enormously tall man, of splendid figure, and impressive presence. That his short, crisp hair had turned gray only served to emphasize the youth of his handsome leonine face. Indeed the only clue to his age lay in a track of devastation among certain ladies no longer in their first youth, who, rumor said, remained unwed for love of him. There were reasons besides his personal beauty to commend him to the weaker sex. He was a brilliant man, not of that narrow aristocracy of learning who require an intelligent auditor. His keen, almost boyish enthusiasm for anything that was occupy-

ing his interest, led him to talk of it as fluently to a school-girl as to his peer. Nor was his charm wholly intellectual, for, to the sense of safety of an ascetic, he added the strong, simple feelings of a pagan, thus offering to beauty all the flattery of brutality without the attendant shock to her sensibilities.

Pauline pushed her plate forward, and leaning her elbows on the table leaned forward with a gesture now characteristic of the club.

"Ah," she said, "it's easy to say that, Mr. Holmes—that money's power, and that in this country women have the spending of it, and should see larger fields than clothes and jewels and vicarious charities, but what would you advise a woman how to make a fortune a profession, a career?"

Everybody began talking at once, Crisp loudest, but Holmes by a sheer preponderance finally emerged triumphant, in the midst of a sentence.

"—political philanthropy, you might call it. A poor man goes into politics, and everyone believes that he is working for his own fortune; a rich man, and it is assumed he wants an office, but a

woman of wealth—what can she be but disinterested, and if she were intelligent as well, why, there you have a power for pure politics. I know many people would call me visionary, but do you know it is a thing I often think when women of wealth complain of having nothing important to do. How many bills do you suppose are lost because no one influential person has their welfare at heart? How many——"

"Do you know what Mike would do with money, if he had it?" Crisp burst in, having no ideas of his own on the subject and having reached his limit of silence. "He wants good music for the poor, not wind (which they might enjoy), but strings, if you please. Free classical concerts, as good as may be, and ten stubs of tickets (to show you take an interest, you see) entitling you to a seat at the Philharmonic. It is a very elaborate plan. Mike has it all worked out. He is really much too practical for a musician. Thus the lower classes are to be led upward" (a gesture).

"Dear, dear, Mr. Crisp," Lucinda murmured to her next-door neighbor, "after all this I am

ashamed to say why I want money." He saw she was about to tell him. She had the clear, confident enunciation of the stage, so that no matter how low she spoke she was sure of commanding her listener. "If you are poor, you have to be so neat and careful, and I do so like to be slovenly and careless. No self-respecting woman would breakfast with her husband in a flannel dressing-gown, but make it a velvet tea-gown, and it is all right. Don't you see what I mean?"

"I see you ring the knell of tea-gowns. They are but the flannel dressing-gown under ornamentation, and bring as plainly an aroma of curl-papers."

"In short, my theory is," said Holmes, who had been talking to Pauline, but now feeling his ideas worthy a larger audience caught up the entire table with some skill. "My idea is that money, far from being sordid, is the symbol of romance, especially in this country. Romance in all ages has clung to the exponent of power. When brute force was power, the strong man was hero. When the Church ruled supreme, the crusader stood for ro-

mance. When kings were absolute, the king, and to-day, the rich man. The interest of our country in our millionnaires isn't vulgar. It is as legitimate as the English peasant's admiration for Launcelot."

"It is a good idea," said Crisp, who a second before had been muttering: "Oh, Lord, ain't he long-winded," but now found himself suddenly in possession of a contribution to the general knowledge. "But don't you really believe it is all a sort of hypnotism, the psychology of the mob?"

"What you are really talking," said Converse, gently, "is my new play."

"A play?" The table turned to him with interest.

"An operetta, a drama, a satire, a phantasmagoria," Converse returned. "Mike sends me up an air or two now and then. Miss Gale had condescended to do me a lyric here and there."

An outline was demanded, Crisp adding, "Only, for heaven's sake, ring the bell, and let us get something more to eat before he begins."

"The first act takes place," Converse began, "in

the Insane Asylum of the Fates, Nineteenth Century Division. (Somewhere I suggest the contents of other rooms. Sixteenth Century, explorations, eldorados, pearl fisheries, and so on; Seventeenth Century, religious saturnalia, burning of witches, and so forth.) Here we have the Court of King Money."

"I see him perfectly," cried Lucinda. "A red-haired, wiry little maniac, with an abnormal sense of the ridiculous."

"The court is motley, a statesman, a poet, a clergyman, anyone to whom the pursuit is not a legitimate primary object. You fancy the different methods of seeking the royal notice. The clergyman in care for the king's soul, the statesman a flatterer, someone else the bluff man-to-man-and-all created-equal manner. The king has a daughter——"

"Red-haired, too," cried Lucinda. "Oh, if you had ever seen me in a red wig!"

"Plain, but extravagantly elegant and *bien mise*——"

"Emeralds the size of hen's eggs in a crown"

(this from Mrs. Converse, whose eyes were dancing). "I should so like to wear mock jewels all day long."

"We have first a duet between the king and his daughter (baritone and contralto), first he and she with the air, which is taken up and echoed servilely by the court, while the royalties change to a sort of laughing accompaniment. Now enter a pair of lovers, very young, very much in love. They are merely inspecting the asylum out of curiosity, but they haven't been there a minute before the boy begins to evince the first symptoms of insanity in a dawning admiration for the princess. A song between the lovers follows:

She.—Pray come away. It's all a snare, she is not fair, she has red hair,
Say what you may, say what you may.
He.—Nay, I will stay. She has a charm which your alarm cannot disarm,
Say what you may, say what you may.

(I think I quote you correctly, Miss Gale.) The girl, however, soprano of course, fails to divert

his mind. His madness develops rapidly, and he is well received, to the fury of the court. A general access of madness seizes everyone, except the soprano, who merely wails in the upper notes of her register, while pandemonium is let loose below. Here you have Rapier's famous crescendo theory that he is always talking about."

"His 'self-control with the cymbals,'" somebody quoted.

"A messenger now enters announcing the approach of the court's hereditary enemy, the King of Ennui. A panic ensues, for no method has ever been discovered by which he could long be held at bay. At length the soprano advances and offers to deal with him single-handed on the condition that should she be successful she shall receive whatever she asks. To this the king agrees.

"The second act (I haven't gone very far with it) is in front of the palace, a long flight of marble steps. It is night. As the curtain goes up the soprano is standing quite alone, and perfectly still at the top of these steps, a garland of roses in her hand. Before the curtain rises, and for some

minutes after, you hear nothing but the approaching march of the King of Ennui and his army (I incline to think that these will consist of personified magazines, newspapers, and any form of social diversion that has past the limit of my endurance). Rapier has done nobly in that march, it weighs like lead, and yet makes your blood run cold. You understand that no one is singing, only every now and then someone in the palace screams. As the king and his army enter, the soprano runs down the steps and begins to dance (that, of course, hasn't any special meaning, but I'm very fond of good dancing, so I let it go until I can think of something more significant), and as she dances she gradually winds the delighted king in her garland. It could be made effective. She calls the court and presents her captive to King Money. Everyone is now at her feet; even her old lover, beginning to recover his sense, sees that the princess, now no longer the central figure, is not so desirable. The soprano makes her request, which is that she and her lover may be allowed to depart at once, but this suits neither the king nor the princess and she

is refused. The court now disperses to prepare for a grand triumphal feast, and the soprano has an opportunity to exchange a few words with her prisoner. She agrees to release him, if, during the feast, he will begin a song which will paralyze the whole court with sleep and weariness. Follows the feast—as many toasts and drinking songs as one has at command. At last, the King of Ennui, hidden, lifts up his voice in song. The soprano claps her hands over her lovers' ears so that he shall not hear. The court falls asleep, and the lovers, after one final passionate duet, escape. The curtain goes down to the King of Ennui's song, the whole court asleep."

Suggestions were offered on all sides, as Converse finished. He was called on to pick out Michael's music on the piano, and Pauline's words were repeated and criticised.

The meeting was on the whole a success. Time slipped on, guests rose to go, and again became involved in discussion.

Yet when Pauline was alone in the darkness of her carriage on her homeward way, all the amuse-

ment and discussion of the evening dropped from her. Only those words of Holmes remained; which, like many ordinary sentences, seemed to have crystallized and even ennobled her own vague feelings: "I tell you that money as a career has not been conceived of by the women of this country."

CHAPTER VIII

IT would, perhaps, be stretching a point to look upon these words of Holmes as the impulse that led to Pauline's final decision, yet such women come to decisions through strange by-paths. Certain it is that after that evening she ceased to debate the question. She did not say in so many words: I am going to marry Archie Hamlin. But she was now aware what her decision was going to be when the critical moment arrived. She could still say truthfully enough that she had not made up her mind, but as an outsider she could look forward and prophesy exactly by what forces, and in what manner, her mind was presently going to be made up.

Some three weeks later, Mrs. Crewe was sitting in the library, reading, with an eye on the clock. At length she said aloud: "Bless the man, he has been here an hour and a half!"

A moment later she heard the front door close,

and hastily raised her book to her eyes, presenting the appearance again of an old lady absorbed in literature; but after fifteen minutes of uninterrupted solitude she rang the bell, and told the servant to tell Miss Pauline that tea was ready. Word came back that Miss Pauline would be down at once.

Pauline, in her own room, was writing:

"Dearest of men, I shall never write to you again. This is the very end—the end I thought we had reached last spring, but there was another step. I am going to be married. It seems absurd that I have no idea how this announcement will strike you; whether it will shock and disgust you, or whether you have been expecting it all along. I suppose you have been expecting it, knowing me as you do, and my weaknesses.

"Don't fancy that I am doing this thing blindly. Let nothing persuade you that I did not love you—the past tense is childish—that I do not love you devotedly.

"You will not want to hear any more. Indeed

there is nothing more to say, except that there will never be any but you, and that I bid you good-by.

PAULINE."

She had written without hesitation, but now she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. It would have been hard to tell whether the calm of sleep or of utter physical exhaustion had overcome her. Human countenance was never blanker.

The house was perfectly quiet. The short afternoon was almost over. The sky was clouded, and the blue winter twilight was already settling over the streets. Here and there in the house opposite lights began to be lit.

At length she got up and crossed the hall. She dreaded the announcement she was about to make for the reason that she believed it would give pleasure, would gain approval of such an exaggerated type as to drive her still further into the attitude of self-contempt. Among the recompenses of the situation she counted her grandmother's gratification as not the least, yet the certainty of hearing it expressed foretold irritation.

She made a conscious effort, in entering the drawing-room where Mrs. Crewe awaited her, to avoid the solemnity of manner due to a climax, the tramp of approaching fate. That she succeeded was shown by Mrs. Crewe's reception of her. The old lady was having trouble with the tea-kettle, and, between jerks at it, said absently:

"I thought Mr. Hamlin was here."

"He went away an hour ago."

There was a pause. Pauline received her cup of tea, sat down near the fire, crossed her feet, and said presently, with a manner almost too pleasant:

"I fear, Louisa, that in the past when we have touched upon the subject of mercenary marriages, you have heard me apply to them such terms as low, immoral, and adjectives, perhaps, even stronger. I now beg you as a friend, a chaperone, and a grandmother to forget such inconsistencies."

Mrs. Crewe looked up. Pauline's tone jarred upon her. She thought it slightly discourteous to force her to look on at this somewhat spiteful self-ridicule—spiteful without being in the least amusing; but what annoyed her most was the faint

suggestion in her granddaughter's inflection of Rapier's method under emotion. She said a trifle coldly:

"You are going to marry Archie Hamlin?"

"I have just promised to do so."

A short silence.

"Be pleased, Louisa, but not too pleased."

"At the risk of annoying you, my dear, I must tell you I am delighted. What do you expect of a greedy old relation who loves you? Besides, the man is a good man, to say nothing of his voice, which might lure angels from heaven. You refused him a few times, I hope."

"Once."

"Ah, so little! I refused your grandfather five times, but I fancy men were more refusable in those days."

Pauline laughed. "Some of the less offensive of my worst traits I seem to have inherited from you."

"Ah, my dear," said the old lady, "you are a better person than I am. Considering how disagreeable you can be, I think you are one of the kindest and most patient people I know."

"This requiem mass, this funeral oration over my virtue is rather painful under the circumstances," said Pauline.

"If I did not know you to be sincere, I should be tempted to accuse you of affectation when you talk like that, Pauline. People are always telling me I have no moral sense. They may be right. I have to admit I have never been able to make a distinction between a good person and a kind person, and why in the world you should be any less kind to your fellow-beings because you are going to marry a man for whom you have not that preternatural feeling called love I really cannot see."

"Yet you will confess, I think, that there is a universal prejudice against such marriages?"

"Universal, my dear child! What are you thinking of! Purely local. Besides, it isn't prejudice, but a distaste. I never said it wasn't disagreeable, perhaps horrible, to marry a man you don't care for, but of course you displease and horrify no one but yourself."

"You frighten me hideously," said Pauline, quickly. "Am I to be so unhappy, then?"

"Not after the first, my dear, not after the first. I fancy you will be extremely happy in all sorts of ways, though I think as far as the man himself is concerned that these relations always remain a little dull and difficult, but then poverty is dull, and earning your own living is difficult. You must consider the alternatives."

"There was another alternative," said Pauline, in a low voice.

"Oh, no, my child, there was not. It was not possible. You could not have been happy with Michael Rapier on his pitiful income, and do you know, that in my opinion, even if he had possessed Golconda, you two would have lived under terribly high pressure for ordinary domesticity. Your feelings were quite out of proportion to the administration of a household."

"Then the administration of a household could have gone to the wall, and ordinary domesticity could have ceased to be ordinary." Pauline was already on her feet before she added: "But I regret nothing. Given my disposition I regret nothing. And you know, Louisa, I'm very fond of Archie.

He is so nice and considerate, and companionable—you have no idea—I sit and talk with him by the hour about all sorts of dull things just as if he were a woman."

"You leave out his greatest recommendation, my dear. He doesn't understand you in the very least, and that is always so restful."

"Restful, I believe you. He doesn't go prying about in dark corners, because it never occurs to him that they exist, and he doesn't attach the slightest importance when I lay bare my soul, because he thinks I am just talking to amuse myself."

Indeed the woman who had decided to sustain the difficult position of betrothed to a man she did not love could scarcely have fallen into better hands than Hamlin's. He never turned her blood to ice and her emotions to rebels by flaunting the standard of the conqueror, or pointing a finger to the rights of a proprietor.

She was fortunate, too, in that his love bore with it no educational mission. He showed no intention of moulding her into the semblance of his "perfect mate." He pointed out no long-observed defects,

nor did he turn the whole light of the masculine point of view upon her feminine errors in such sentences as: "Having no brother, my dear, you scarcely appreciate—" An atmosphere of placidity surrounded them. His time, his horses, the long processes of his mind were wholly at her disposal. There were none of those disturbances, those gusts of doubt, tempests of jealousy, and clearing thunder-storms of self-reproach that mark so many engagements, that time of preliminary adjustment of two units to one.

For the first few weeks, Pauline had stood, as it were, with her hand on the flood-gate of flattering endearments, prepared to swamp the first spark of discontent, his first suggestion that she gave him but a limited sovereignty. No such suggestions came, and, incredible as it seemed to her, she soon discovered that he found their relation eminently satisfying. The truth of the matter was that he was so gratified at the permanence of his own feelings he had no leisure to consider hers. In his past experience he had been not only a great deal sought, but not a little loved. The obstacles to his

happiness had always arisen in himself, and it was here naturally that he most feared to see them appear again.

If he found Pauline at times capricious, baffling, alienated, he merely noted with delight that her inaccessibility made him all the fonder of her. Thus where she had not wished, but certainly expected, to wound, she found she had more often given pleasure.

Before long, too, she gave up dreading the moment when he would call upon her to explain or repudiate the brutalities of her first refusal. No such request was made, since in his opinion they were things of the past. She had refused him, and he had suffered, through many sleepless nights and empty, exhausting days. But now she had accepted him, and in wiping out her "no," she had wiped out the horrors that had accompanied it. The incident was closed, and had no connection whatsoever with the present, unless he chose to acknowledge to himself in moments of illuminated self-examination, that he held her now more valuable for having for a time worn the appearance of the unattainable.

The last and largest lion in her path—his possible jealousy at some hint of Rapier's existence—turned out to be chained like the others. He was, he had assured her, by no means incapable of such a feeling, a statement she doubted, knowing the number of danger-signals she had succeeded in hurrying him unsuspectingly past. Certainly he was not jealous as the other men she had known, distrustful of a name too often mentioned or too obviously suppressed. His imagination did not take fire until his eyes actually beheld, and there was nothing now for his eyes to behold. She wondered blankly how he contrived to miss the evidences in his little kingdom of a former mightier monarch. The very lines of her own verse which he was fondest of, seemed to shout news to heaven of a predecessor.

Once when they were driving together, he had quoted apropos of his own feelings:

"Or perfumes, fresh and fleet,
Music, too keenly sweet,
Hushed dawn that runs to greet
The star above it.

How could I know the pain
Of all fair things and vain,—
Was but my need made plain,
Was but your prophet."

After a minute he asked:

"When did you write that?"

She named a time that antedated their meeting, and then bowed her head to the storm. A long silence followed, during which she hugged perhaps for the last time the secrecy of the past, during which his mind wandered unperturbed to the horses he was driving, as his next remark betrayed.

Her undisciplined nature had made her look to this period as one of stress and conflict; on her side, rebellion, struggles toward freedom; on his, bitter reproach that he should be made to fight for his own. For any number of hateful scenes she had been prepared. She was surprised to find that there were none, that she was only bored to death by an almost post-nuptial calm.

They might have been married for years, she used to think, when, for instance, she and Mrs. Crewe would make an excursion to her future home in

order to inspect a bay-window he was throwing out in the room destined for hers. She would sit on the carpenter's bench, a cold February wind blowing through the glassless panes, and listen to an endless discussion concerning the suitable sort of shutter; the carpenter advocating the well-known stout slatted variety, Hamlin wavering toward an inside sliding contrivance, existing only in his own imagination. They measured and tapped and talked, Hamlin trying to overcome his repugnance to the carpenter's suggestion, the carpenter (like most of his trade an intelligent, open-minded man) attempting to approve of Hamlin's invention.

Pauline remembered to have felt much the same when in her childhood her mother's games were interrupted by long consultations with the cook.

Under such experiences she grew apathetic rather than impatient. In truth, Hamlin had to a certain degree enmeshed her affection in the web of little facts that he was forever weaving. In this, perhaps, as much as in anything else, he stood differentiated in her mind from Rapier, who seemed to feel a certain indecency in making her intimate

with the details of his life; he treated them as the ideal housekeeper treats the machinery of the household—as something to be perfectly adjusted and never mentioned. Hamlin set himself no such artificial standards. She wondered sometimes at the amount of her knowledge. She knew the name of his tailor, the temperature of his bath, and exactly why he preferred leggings to boots in the hunting-field.

It was all very well for her to smile at these confidences. She knew, nevertheless, that they had in themselves endeared him to her.

CHAPTER IX

ONE evening, some two months after her engagement, she sat awaiting Hamlin in her little sitting-room. The curtains were drawn across the high French windows, the heat of the fire brought out the scent of Hamlin's own roses on the piano, and she, in the black and white dress of his choosing, was as pretty and kind a welcomer as a man could ask.

The instant he entered she saw that a cloud was upon him.

"My poor Archie," she said, detaining his drooping hands in hers, "what is the matter? Are you ill? Do you find you hate me?"

He imitated a smile. "No," he said, and his voice seemed to issue from a cave of sorrows.

She pushed a chair near the fire, and curled on the floor beside it, prepared to charm.

"Such a horrid old lady has been here, to-day, Archie, dear," she began. "She said she heard I was going to settle down. I replied she must have

been misinformed, I was about to be married, but *that*, she insisted, was just what she had understood, and that you were exactly the man to steady me. Archie, if I should ever see the slightest disposition on your part to steady me, I should spin right out of your hand like a top."

She looked up over her shoulder at her unsuccess, and envied Pygmalion his aptitude for vivifying statues. Failure was always disagreeable to her.

At length she grew almost frightened, really sorry for him, more moved than he had often seen her.

"What is it, Archie?" she said.

She spoke almost hardly, in remembrance of an earlier manner. In a school where emotions had been frequent and strong enough to live under repression, she had learnt this tone. There it had not been misunderstood. It made Hamlin furious.

He had spent a sleepless night, pursued by the goblin of a not very discreditable past, rendered hideous to him by the combined effect of night, exhaustion, love, and a religious temperament. He had come with the intention, partly noble, partly

selfish, of laying the burden upon Pauline, but he now found himself hopelessly antagonized by her tone. He deliberately lit a cigarette before he answered as one who shuts a door: "Nothing."

Silence followed. She rose and turned down a flaring lamp. The pink light flashed for an instant from her wrist to her elbow, but he did not see. He was staring into the fire.

The clock, with a social dislike to pauses, began to tick ostentatiously. Pauline pursed up her lips in a school-boy imitation of a whistle. He did not notice her. She strangled an imaginary yawn. He did not see. Indeed, she might have flung her arms about his neck and buried her head in his shoulder without approaching an inch nearer him. He had removed himself beyond her reach.

She had not the least idea whether she were witnessing an exhibition of sorrow or of ill-temper, and the alternatives called for opposite courses of action. First she thought the latter, and fancied herself beginning a conversation of conventional necessity. "Have you been much to the theatre of late?" or "Do you not find the weather unseason-

able?" This could not fail to annoy, but just as she was feeding her imagination upon the picture, she became convinced he was really unhappy, and so wavered in silence between the two opinions, sure only that she was not amused.

She now heard with a sensation she could not question was relief the sound of a hansom pulling up at the door. Evidently Archie's visit was to be brief if he had not dismissed his cab.

There was a step in the hall, and a servant opened the door, and said:

"Mr. Rapier."

"Oh, the deuce," Hamlin murmured, "I wanted to talk to you."

Every ray of expression had left Pauline's face.

Archie wondered concerning the new-comer's nationality. Not an American, he thought, nor a Latin, he was too plainly blond in spite of the efforts of an equatorial sun. A North European, a Swede? Not with those eyes. Or, no, an Austrian. Archie was pleased with his own acuteness. He had known Austrians with just that grave alertness of manner.

In the meantime, the following dialogue was taking place:

"Forgive my coming at such an hour. I have only a few days."

"You returned unexpectedly?"

"I had news that brought me."

"Not bad, I hope."

"Not good."

"Mr. Rapier," turning to her betrothed, "arrives from South America."

And now Hamlin's strange, keen interest in facts saved the situation. He *wanted to know* about South America. The conversation, passing by Pauline, flowed smoothly between the two men.

Would such a trip be possible for a lady?

It depended on the lady.

For Miss Gale?

Why, with a smile, no.

Archie's foreign theory wavered; surely that was the smile of a compatriot, intimate, self-revealing, not a mere social necessity.

In a few minutes Hamlin got up. Two pairs of

eyes flashed like search-lights upon him. What was he going to do? He shook hands with Pauline, and with Rapier. Then finding her hand cold and vibrating like a telegraph-wire in a high wind, he fussed gently about the room, poking the fire and pulling the curtains.

He reached the door and became blocked by the problem of whether he should come the next day at three or at five. There were several reasons in favor of each hour. He named them. Had she any preference? Not the slightest. At length he decided in favor of the latter.

The door had scarcely closed behind him when they were in each other's arms.

It was Rapier, who, moving away, said:

"You will be pleased to hear that that was the very last thing I meant to do."

"What has happened?" she asked, in the very tone Hamlin had censured.

Rapier turned, leaned his shoulders against the mantle-piece, and catching one heel on the fender, said: "Several things. First, you are about to be married; second, I have in my pocket a check for

sixty thousand dollars; third, I am told I have just six months to live."

"Michael!" Her scream might have passed the door. They listened apprehensively, before he answered in tones contrastingly low:

"Did the news need breaking? But this is resurrection anyhow, you know. I ceased to exist last April."

"What is it?"

"Have I forgotten your distaste to pathology? We won't go into that. Be content with the statement."

"You have seen a competent doctor?"

"The most competent."

"You suffer?"

"Nothing. The element of pity may be absolutely dismissed. Let me offer you instead the suggestion that two people, even if you were one of them, could live for six months on sixty thousand."

"You and I! Oh, it's not possible."

"That is, of course, for you to say, but let me understand. If I go away this other marriage *is* possible."

The sound of someone crossing the hall. They dropped their dialogue, waiting with eyes on the door. Hamlin entered.

"On second thoughts," he said, "I think I'll be here at three."

He had forgotten, he went on to explain, that he had an appointment with a man who was to bring samples of wall-papers for Pauline's room. Wall-papers, he added to Rapier, with a regretful shake of his head, were a dreadful problem. Rapier's nod agreed that they were the devil.

"At three, then, Archie," said Pauline, in a tone that seemed so plainly to urge him away, that Rapier turned to watch his resentment. Archie's eyes were fixed on the wall opposite him.

"That's a nice color," he said, with conviction. Silence fell on them all while they observed it, then "Well, good-night," he said, and shut the door.

Even when they were again alone, Rapier's shoulder remained turned to her—an eloquent comment. She moved toward him, perfectly confident of her ability to turn him to her again, and

then seemed to change her mind. She sat down at her writing-table, dropping her elbows upon it, and her head in her hands. There was a long silence. The clock ticked to deaf ears.

"He seems a nice man," Rapier said at length.

"He is."

Again silence.

'Oh," she said, suddenly, throwing out her hands, "it makes me creep, it makes me creep to think of him."

It bore some resemblance to hardness that this avowal did not move Rapier either metaphorically or actually. He stood with his shoulder still leaning against the mantle-piece and said: "The gentleman you are about to honor with your hand?"

"You are not kind, Michael," she complained, childishly.

"Ah, well," he offered the explanation without moving, "you see I love you very badly."

"You must have known how it would be if you came back."

"And did it never cross your mind that I might come back after you were his wife? I wouldn't do

it? You trust a great deal to the generosity of a supplanted lover."

"You were not supplanted," with a certain sulky reproof of his depreciation of his own power.

"There it is. You married to a man who makes you creep, and I not supplanted. It would be interesting to know your theory about the future."

"You are pleased to be unusually brutal tonight."

"I have merely repeated your own statements."

Pauline rose with a good deal of dignity, and looked at him squarely. "That any man but you is distasteful to me, yes; that no one can ever supplant you, yes; but that I shall marry this one, no, for since you first entered the room, I have known it was impossible."

If this renunciation cost her anything, it was repaid her in the kiss that followed, as unenvenomed as the first they had ever known.

And now Mrs. Crewe entered.

"My dear people (how do you do, Mr. Rapier?), I am the most modern of chaperones, but the clock

stands at eleven and I must suggest this gentleman's visit come to an end."

"He wants me to marry him," said Pauline.

Now Mrs. Crewe was a gentlewoman, the product of social training. Under most circumstances if she found herself in possession of unpalatable opinions only her intimates knew of them, though sometimes if annoyed she would hint at them to outsiders. On the rare occasions, however, on which she lost her temper she allowed herself to phrase the most unwelcome thoughts of her heart with a completeness not far removed from coarseness. So now she turned to Rapier, who, hatefully unmoved in appearance, was standing by, his arms folded, and said with a manner almost innocent:

"Again, my dear! It seems he was more content to take no for an answer when your future looked less desirable."

"If my standards were purely financial, you would make me feel dreadfully ashamed, Mrs. Crewe," said Rapier, with pleasant, filial mockery. Knowing that between him and the old lady a real attachment had existed, he refused to regard her as

an enemy, until she made a plain statement of hostility.

"I am scarcely fitted to discuss standards with you moralists," she returned. "I very likely show myself unethical in failing to be dazzled by your offer—this opportunity for her to spend the rest of her life wrestling with your monthly bills, in the smell of her own cooking."

This had the note of war, and he asked:

"I am then to understand that you approved of the connection she was about to form?"

"Mr. Rapier, you are impertinent."

Michael had already felt his mistake. "Dear Mrs. Crewe, forgive me," he said. "After all, we both want the same thing—Pauline's welfare."

"I shall not marry Archie," said Pauline to the air.

Mrs. Crewe raised her eyes to heaven, but answered nothing. She was, after all, a lady.

"Let me make myself plain," said Rapier, sitting down beside the old lady; "your granddaughter will not marry the gentleman who has just left us——"

"And why will she not?" asked Mrs. Crewe, in a tone which would better have suited "And what will prevent her?" Rapier answered both letter and spirit when he said: "Because I will not let her."

"Oh," as if the explanation were perfectly satisfactory, then: "If before you went away you had made it clear that you would not allow her to marry, you would have saved yourself a long journey."

"I think you miss the point, Mrs. Crewe, or rather we disagree as to the point, which lies to my mind in Pauline's feelings. Pray don't suppose that if she had loved this man——"

"And how did you in South America know that she did not?" The obvious answer to this question evidently did not cross her mind, and came as a shock when Pauline made it:

"I wrote and told him."

Mrs. Crewe looked at her and then away, as if she did not wish to establish even the relation of a glance between them.

"How could you do such a thing?" she said.

"Our old difference, Mrs. Crewe," said Rapier. "Does sin lie in naming the things that are?"

"Sin! Pooh, the intolerable folly of it. Didn't she know it would bring you straight back?"

Rapier laughed. "Well, here I am," he said. "Now the question is, given the fact that she is not going to marry Mr. Hamlin, shall she remain here, returning her wedding-presents, or shall she marry me?"

"One hates to be trivial, but marry you on what?"

"On some sixty thousand dollars, which——"

"A few beggarly thousands a year. What possible good will that do you?"

"None at all if it were a question of years, but as it happens, I have not six months to live."

"Who says so?"

"A specialist."

"I have known specialists make mistakes in these matters," Mrs. Crewe said, with a sniff. Rapier chose to pass over this discredit cast on his veracity, and answered:

"I think you would have confidence in this one."

"Possibly. And afterward?"

"After. Why, at least she will be happier than if she were tied to a man she cares nothing for. Ah, forgive me, I see your question was more practical. Afterward, she will have a small income—not very much, but better than nothing."

The last words hit Mrs. Crewe on a spot her conscience made tender. If Michael could assure her granddaughter of any income in the future, he had done more than she. "At least you convince me," she said, "that your last months on earth may be made very bearable at Pauline's expense."

At this all three were silent, Rapier because he did not consider it justly in the line of argument, Pauline because she had adopted the rôle of audience, and Mrs. Crewe, because she was deriving secret satisfaction from having expressed herself, as she felt, tolerably neatly.

At length Rapier spoke:

"I have been waiting for you to say, what I suppose I need scarcely point out, and that is that you have only to assert that you will not receive Pauline

back at my death, and I have nothing to do but drop the matter."

"And suppose I say so now?"

"Frankly, I should find your statement quite incredible, but, of course, it would be impossible for me to act on that belief. I should therefore make over all my funds to Pauline, and—what would one do with six months under the circumstances?"

"You are, of course, aware that she could not accept money from you."

"My dear Mrs. Crewe, I am aware of nothing in the world Pauline may not accept from me. Would you receive her back?"

A great many expressions crossed Mrs. Crewe's countenance, most conspicuous a sly sense of power, but at last she said, with a manner frankly sulky: "Yes, I would, at least I suppose I would. I should like a few minutes' conversation with you alone, Mr. Rapier, if Pauline will permit me."

Pauline looked docilely at her lover, and in response to a slight gesture of his hand, left the room.

Mrs. Crewe settled back in her chair, and drew

her elbows close to her hips. "And now," she said, "what's your trouble?"

Michael had risen and was standing in the middle of the room, one hand in his pocket, the other, crossing his chin, pulled the farther end of his mustache. "Ah, yes," he said, "you would want to know that, quite naturally, quite rightly"—but here he stopped.

"Want," Mrs. Crewe murmured, dubiously. "Well, without the knowledge I certainly shouldn't pledge myself to be so far a party to your plans as to receive back your widow." She used the word with some satisfaction; it shut this pervasive person so completely from her granddaughter's future.

"I think you ought to be told," Michael decided at length. "But first I must have your word that you won't under any circumstances repeat it to Pauline, now or at any future time. I would not insult your sense of honor by such a form, only I can't afford to neglect any precaution. Have I your promise?"

"Oh, yes," easily.

"Why," said Michael, raising his eyes from the carpet and fixing them gravely on the old lady, "there isn't anything the matter with me at all."

Mrs. Crewe fairly gasped. "You don't mean it's all a trap?" she said.

"Scarcely," he smiled. "Only instead of blowing out my brains in South America as I at first thought, six months from now I shall meet with an accident out shooting, or get washed overboard when no one's on deck."

"Oh, suicide," said Mrs. Crewe, and there was a long pause.

"I don't disapprove of suicide," she continued at length. "It is not very creditable, I suppose, but I don't disapprove of it at all. Indeed, as far as my own view is concerned, I much prefer your plan as I now understand it. It seemed rather forlorn to think of Pauline of all people tied for six months to an invalid. I don't think you would like her as a nurse, Mr. Rapier. But, of course, this is different, if you are in perfectly sound health. I don't know that I should disapprove at all if—" she hesitated.

"If?" said he.

"If I had the slightest guarantee that you would really do it when the time came."

A certain increase in judicial attention was the only sign that she had angered her antagonist.

"I have been in the habit of paying my bills, Mrs. Crewe," he said.

"Oh, dear me, I'm not accusing you of cowardice, though there are worse crimes than the love of life. I only mean the whole plan is impractical. How long do you suppose it would be before Pauline found out? Marriage is so omniscient, you know, and then she would hang on your neck——"

Rapier interrupted her quickly. "If she does find out, I am in her hands; but she will not."

"And how rigorous will you be, do you think, in keeping it from her?"

Michael threw back his head and laughed shortly. "It seems you have a tolerably mean opinion of me," he said.

"No, no," Mrs. Crewe answered, calmly, "quite the contrary. I am only trying to show you that

this scheme is impossible. Pauline would know the truth in three weeks."

"Now, there," said Michael, "I think you fail in appreciation of her character. For most women what you say is perfectly true, but for Pauline, no. It would seem quite natural to her that I should prefer her not to know anything about my health. She would respect my wishes absolutely. Bodily ills are not a pleasant topic to her; she would much rather banish them anyhow. She would have no scientific curiosity in the matter."

"But curiosity of another sort."

"No, nor that either. It would be a point of honor with her to take no steps to find out, and Pauline's sense of honor is absolute. I don't know that I can make it much plainer without going into the whole philosophy of our relation to each other."

"Well," said Mrs. Crewe, still unconvinced but open to conviction, "suppose it all works out as you say, have you no hesitation in subjecting her to such a shock?"

"Why, there, Mrs. Crewe, we are at the very heart of the question. If she had married Hamlin,

knowing that she would never see me again, my death would still be a shock to her, and yet you would not have expected me to live on merely to save her from it, though it would then have been attended by every circumstance that can make the death of someone we love unbearable, regret, remorse—. But this way there will be no bitterness. Take away from my death any dread of it on my part, and any remorse for her treatment of me on hers, and it is, I think, no worse than a separation."

There was a long silence, then Mrs. Crewe said, with an entire change of manner:

"My dear Michael, I don't like to hear you talk like this."

She rose, and coming close to him, laid her hand on his arm. "You are young, you know, and there are a great many other women."

"A great many." He smiled.

"Couldn't you just go away? Be musical, be bad, be something, and give up this horrible idea."

"It is six months or to-morrow, Mrs. Crewe."

By a mutual impulse, he leaned forward and she kissed him. After a pause she broke out tremu-

lously: "Oh, it's dreadful, it's hideous. I wish I dared prevent you, but I am afraid to play with life and death as you do."

"You mean you won't hinder me now?"

She wrung her hands. "I dare not."

He walked to the door, and paused with his hand on the knob. "She is never to know. My death does not release you from your promise."

Mrs. Crewe nodded distractedly, and he went out alone to find Pauline.

CHAPTER X

THREE days later the world was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Michael Rapier had sailed from New Orleans in their yacht for the West Indies. Censure was not slow to follow. Pauline was blamed, not because here was unequivocal proof that she had been about to marry a man she did not love, but rather because she now threw him over. The world is used to dealing with suspicions and possibilities, and even when these clouds are playing about the darkest deeds, can behave with not a little generosity, but a mere simple plain motive, too obvious to give rise to discussion, surprises almost like a crime. Love, which hand in hand with expediency makes pretty marriages; love, which divorced from expediency leads to tears but not to action, the polite world values sincerely, but love become a single compelling incentive smacks a little too much of the columns of the daily papers.

The poor runaways stood indeed alone; there was no one to applaud. Those who loved them could

not but feel anxiety, and the better they were understood, the more the unwisdom of their conduct was appreciated. If the generalizing world called such love-matches foolish, those who knew could call this one a very carnival of folly.

Then Archie's friends—a large body, since all with whom he came in contact entertained for him a simple tender feeling—were loud in resenting not only his suffering, but the undeserved humiliation.

The papers fell shrieking upon their prey: "The distinguished composer and his fair collaborator," "The well-known poetess and her chosen interpreter." The sale of Pauline's books, which had, of course, increased at her engagement, now went up beyond the publisher's highest dreams, and as for their joint songs, the music-shops could not keep them on the counters.

There were those who pitied Rapier, and a few who dared to envy him, while a great many people, among them his own family, joined in agreeing that Hamlin had had a very lucky escape.

Archie's own opinion was shrouded in mystery.

He remained quietly in the country attending to his stables and farms as usual.

A few days after the facts were made public, he was seated in Mrs. Crewe's drawing-room. It was their first meeting since the evening of Rapier's return.

The muscles of his face had hardened in downward curves.

They had been together for some time, and Mrs. Crewe had entirely failed to understand his bearing. Gloom was, of course, overspreading him, yet he seemed sad without being in any measure crushed; calm, without ironic bitterness. Indeed, if she had not known the facts, she might have debated whether to call him depressed or abstracted.

"After all, my dear Archie," she was saying, " 'it is a noose, you know.' If I were a man I should not dream of marrying. What do you gain? A home? Believe me, yours is conducted with far more respect for your comfort than if Pauline were at the head of it. Society? Your friends are much more interested in you as long as you remain single. A companion? Well, we won't go into that. Amuse-

ments? Surely the only really amusing things in life are its possibilities, and marriage wipes these out with one sweep."

"Don't," said Hamlin, piteously, but she did not notice him.

"You have always been so dependent on your little moods and manners, and do you realize that you never could have been gloomy without exciting comment, nor cross without being a brute, nor late without inconveniencing your wife, nor have fallen in love without being criminal? Pauline has run away. Well, can't you manage to look upon it as a release from the very high price you had agreed to pay for her society?"

There was a pause, then Archie said:

"I'll tell you how I do look at it; as a very lucky escape for her."

"For *her!* My dear man, what do you mean?"

"I shouldn't have made her happy, you know." Despair rang in his voice. "I shouldn't make any woman happy."

"And why not?"

"Because there are days when I shouldn't care

whether she were happy—when I'd rather she wasn't."

"You wouldn't feel like that if you were treated with tact."

"I hate tact."

"Do you think you would smell it in the air like patchouli?"

"I'd lay traps to find it, and if I did—" He shook his head; the suggestion of prolonged resentment was evident.

"You are absurd, Archie," said the old lady. "If you only knew what she had taken in exchange."

"Why, isn't she going to be happy?" he asked, with vague surprise.

Mrs. Crewe thought that at last she detected in this question a hint of jealousy to explain his attitude, and answered:

"Is any woman going to be happy with a selfish husband?" though she knew that Rapier's selfishness was at least problematic. She seemed, however, to give but little pleasure.

"Nothing is as selfish as moods," he answered, deliberately.

"Oh, dear me," said Mrs. Crewe, irritably, "you have evidently never met a clever, sophistical man, bent on having his own way."

"At least," said Archie, "he loves her."

"Oh, yes, he loves her."

Archie sighed. "The first thing that struck me on reading her note—at least one of the first things was (I almost said it out loud), how sure they must be of themselves!"

"Too sure to listen to reason."

"Do you suppose," with curiosity, "that they never wondered whether they mightn't regret it?"

"I could not see that anything so intelligent occurred to them."

Archie's scientific interest came to the front, puzzling Mrs. Crewe, who did not understand it. "But what I always want to know when people do important things like that so suddenly is: do they act quickly so that they sha'n't have time to think, or do they think quickly? Which do you believe, Mrs. Crewe?"

"Think, my dear man! Have you never acted without thinking?"

"Never," answered Archie, on a strong falling note. His chin sank on his breast, more it seemed because his face grew longer than because his head was bent. "That's it," he added. His regret was unmistakable.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Crewe, confused but amiable, "I don't consider it a specially creditable ability."

"I do," said Archie. "I'd give anything in the world to feel I might behave as those two have—deciding their whole lives in a few minutes, but I couldn't. I should be physically incapable of it. I couldn't ask a woman to run away with me. Even if I were sure enough of my own feelings, I should think it very likely that she might be happier with the other man."

"An idea which never occurred to Mr. Rapier."

"I think the better of him that it did not," replied Archie. "Besides, he was quite right."

"I must say I don't understand the way you take this thing."

"It isn't the way I should have supposed I should take it."

"Are you suggesting you don't feel it?"

"Well," Archie weighed his words, desiring exact truth, "I should be glad to feel it more."

When soon afterward he took his leave, or more accurately drifted sadly and gently from her presence, Mrs. Crewe scarcely regretted his departure. According to her estimate, Hamlin had lowered Pauline, not himself, by his attitude. It seemed to Mrs. Crewe a plain humiliation for her granddaughter that in the six weeks of her engagement she had not been able to inspire a stronger passion.

She was engaged in writing letters, when later in the afternoon, Mrs. Wyeth was announced. She entered, talking as she came:

"I've come to see all the new presents. How do you do, Mrs. Crewe. I hear his sister has been looking at pearls. I had hoped it might have been rubies. Pauline always suggests rubies to me, and topazes, only of course they are not a precious stone, however; perhaps that will be Archie's part. Where is Pauline?"

Mrs. Crewe, taking in the situation, in view of her knowledge of the fact that Mrs. Wyeth was not

a conscientious reader of the press, looked up at this question, and took the paltry satisfaction that the situation permitted.

"Pauline," she said, "must, I should think, be somewhere off the coast of Florida, or possibly not quite so far——"

"The coast of Florida! And may I ask what is taking her there?"

"Michael Rapier, or more correctly, his schooner."

The news had Gorgon-like power. Mrs. Wyeth remained an instant transfixed, her lower jaw dropped; then springing again to life, and planting her umbrella on the hearth-rug, like a flag on the ramparts, "And why in the world, Mrs. Crewe," she said, "have you permitted such a thing?"

"For exactly the same reason, my dear Minnie, that you permit the law of gravitation. These two people were in love with each other in a way that is fortunately rare, for from the days of Guinevere, I understand it has pretty regularly made trouble."

"Love! Selfishness, I call it. That dreadful man. I for one never saw anything to admire in him, and

Archie Hamlin, worth a dozen of the other, poor dear! Well, you may be pleased——"

"I impress you as pleased?" Mrs. Crewe put in, but was not noticed.

"But for my part I call it scandalous."

"I will not be scolded by you, Minnie Wyeth," the elder lady now began firmly. "Pauline has scolded me because I approved of her engagement, and Michael Rapier has scolded me because I did not approve of his wild scheme, and I'm a lonely, disappointed old woman, and it seems to me I am called on to pay the price of Pauline's happiness, and I don't think she is going to be happy——"

"Happy!" said Mrs. Wyeth; "does anyone suppose so?"

The lovers themselves had fallen into this error. Both lovers of the sea, its aspects in southern waters went near to intoxicate them. They had left the ice and cold and gray water of the north far behind them, and were slipping down the coast toward the Caribbean Sea.

Day after day they could satisfy their eyes with the colors about them—color which seemed wholly

independent of the pale sky—color that gleamed pure, glassy, transparent blue, in the wave that broke from the schooner's side. Now and then a lilac nautilus went nodding by in cheerful isolation, and flying-fish, hurling themselves out of the boat's course, skimmed the water, and dropped like stones into the hollow of a wave.

They had done wisely in thus cutting themselves off from man and all their previous surroundings. Their two arch-enemies were far from them. The world, which had pressed so heavily upon them, was scarcely suggested in the empty circle of the ocean, or the flat sandy islands, or high blue capes upon the horizon, or the desolate steps of Cape Maisi. Time, their deadliest foe, seemed to be obliterated. They saw, not a day, but a panorama in the cool yellow sunrises when the sea remained an obstinate gray, and a small breeze sprang up, which in the north would be called a spring breeze, but here brought no hint of an icy past and a fiery future, in the hot noons, and placid evenings, under the undescribable splendor of the southern stars.

It seemed as if they had never existed before.

The aspect of life changed for them as the field of an opera-glass for the first time focussed. Every faculty suddenly leaped to higher activity. Their sense, their power of enjoyment grew keen as never before. It was not only the beauty of the world that thrilled them, but their own new sensitiveness to it. The truth was that they had always stimulated each other like wine, and were now strung still higher, by the consciousness of the bitter briefness of their union. They lived indeed under the strongest of intoxicants, for to ordinary human passion they added the white hot passion of the mind, the fever of naked intelligence. All compromise, all difference between thought and speech were wiped out. They found themselves telling the things they felt in terms poignantly, accurately true to each other.

Michael might have seen in this mood only an instinctive effort on his part to squeeze the essence of the rest of his life into these months, had it not been so plainly reflected in Pauline.

As time went on, it was proved that he had shown himself versed in her nature. She made no effort, expressed no wish to inform herself on a matter of

which he had told her frankly he desired her to remain in ignorance. Her acquiescence could only be understood in the light of their whole past.

Their relation had always been one of reserves, almost of concealments. Each was of a type that sustains many relations to others, both men and women, and their idea of intimacy with each other did not lie in encroaching on these domains. They had, besides, rigorously withheld from each other the routine of their daily life. This, which sounds a simple fact enough, is rarer among lovers than one supposes. Most of us learn soon after babyhood of how little importance to others are the commonplaces of daily life, and we grow accustomed to suppressing the impulse to recount them. Yet the impulse is there and breaks out afresh to the stimulus of a lover, a being who finds our meanest action as interesting as we ourselves, not for itself, but for its connection with us. For ten who are sufficiently clear-sighted to refuse such small confidences, there is not one woman who will not demand them. Women for the most part are bred and nourished on the details of life, and to deny them this is to deny

them not only the outward and visible sign of intimacy, but perhaps the only part of it which they have been taught to value. Somewhat like this would Pauline and Michael have formulated their views. Their reserves, therefore, were conscious, but concerned facts alone. Mental processes, according to their opinion, were always of interest, and with these they made each other indeed familiar. Thus Rapier had good reason for trusting his own judgment in regard to Pauline.

Nor had he been mistaken in his estimate of the amount of happiness she would get from the situation. This was no small measure.

He was to die and die soon. Cruel as the fact was, by its very cruelty it had given them this boon dropped from the sky, these six months together. There was, as he had predicted, no bitterness for her. She could not say "Ah, if you could but live," for if he had been going to live they would have been apart. The question presented to her was simply: will you spend the last months of this man's life with him, or away from him? The certainty of his death she had accepted from the first, knowing that

otherwise he would not have come to her. That for a little while before the end they should be together, as they had never hoped to be, seemed only a blessed wonder, an unexpected gift, an extra largess on the part of Fate. She had, of course, her moments of anguish. She awoke sometimes in the twilight of morning, when the mind, wiped clear of minor impressions, grips essentials with the grip of agony; now and then in a solitary interval, she would catch a vision of a world that contained no Michael—a horror that left her heart bloodless. Yet love, like all passions, occupies itself almost wholly with the present; the promise of future rewards does not appease, nor approaching disaster wholly dismay it.

Michael and Pauline loved each other, and the present sang loudly.

CHAPTER XI

THE first port they put into was Havana. Michael had been before to the lively little city. The afternoon after their arrival, he was smoking a cigar and listening to the band in one of the Parks near the hotel, while Pauline was dressing for dinner. Suddenly he became aware that someone who had been approaching him had stopped short, throwing out his hands with an elaborate gesture of welcome. The next instant he perceived that it was Don Ramon. Michael sprang up. They met warmly.

Don Ramon was a lightly built man; his skin dark, his hair gray. There was something of the eagle in his look, but a small friendly eagle, for the features were delicate, and his dark, bright eyes seemed at first sight to be continually smiling. Later one saw that they were really wholly inscrutable eyes, and that they owed their look of merriment to the fine lines at their corners, and that these were no more necessarily drawn by laughter than by long gazing on distant horizons. His manner was

dignified to a degree that Anglo-Saxons cannot reach without pomposity. Don Ramon's dignity was not in the least pompous, it was not even self-conscious, but simple and approachable, as the dignity of a thoroughbred animal. Nor was this at all impaired when without more ado he embraced Michael, and then patting him on the shoulder went on to explain how he had just been thinking of him. What, he wanted to know, was Michael doing in Havana.

Michael replied, conscious of having written Don Ramon no word of his marriage, that he might ask the same of him.

"Oh," said the older man, "I am here for a day or so to see my brother, who lives here. I am on my way to London and Hamburg. I am going to see my agents. It will be a great year for coffee-growers. It is well we met, Michael. You will now come with me. We will attend to business, we will hear some good music, then in September we will return to Paraiso. All my coffee will bear this season. It will be something unprecedented. I shall need your help. No, no," he held up his hand. "I will not take

no for an answer. We shall go on a little trip together, *verdad?*"

"My dear sir," said Michael, as simply as he could, "I have been married six weeks."

There was a noticeable pause. Michael did not turn his head, knowing that to his companion the news would be unwelcome. At length Don Ramon said:

"You are on what is called your 'honeymoon'?"

Michael nodded. He supposed it would be called that, though he had not before thought of attaching the word to these final six months of his.

"Ah, well," said the other, gently. "You will never come back to Paraiso."

"No," said Michael. To this much he might commit himself.

"There are many things that you will do no more. It is not freedom, but many men like it. Your wife is—what? A Frenchwoman?"

"An American. A New-Yorker."

"Ah, then indeed it is not freedom. It is frank slavery, but many men like it even more. Good-by, my dear Miguel."

Michael put his hand on the other's arm. "You will dine with her and me this evening. No, it is I who won't take no for an answer. I ask it as a favor." They looked at each other, and Don Ramon said he would be very much honored. Michael knew he made a sacrifice of his inclinations, but it occurred to him that in a few months the two people in the world who most loved him would be glad to have known each other.

He brought Don Ramon to their sitting-room, and then knocked at Pauline's door.

She was already dressed, and having kicked off the absurd little high-heeled pink *mules* in which she was accustomed to go clicking about her bedroom, she was standing on one foot (showing a good deal of lace ruffling), while she attempted to draw on a patent-leather slipper. Michael knelt down and put it on.

"Thank you, dear sir," she said, patting his bent head. "I am so glad I did not bring Eugenie. You are quite as useful, and do not make me discontented by telling me how chic all the other ladies are in their best clothes. Give me a handkerchief.

No, not that kind, the ones with lace. Have you no sense of fitness? Do I look as you would have me? There, you have forgotten that this is an occasion. This is the first time we have ever dined alone—on dry land, I mean."

Michael groaned. "Oh, if we only were," he said. "Don Ramon Heredia is in the next room, and I have asked him to dine with us."

"Ah, Michael! There, there, I will be everything I should be. We will, since you think right, make freely this magnificent present of an evening. I can be as generous as you." She laid her hand on the door and went into the sitting-room.

"I do not feel that we are strangers, Don Ramon," she said.

"Ah, Madame," he answered, "I owe you a grudge. I should have taught Miguel to be content, if you had not decided that he must be happy."

"Is it a thing to be taught?"

"Yes, in the right surroundings." Don Ramon's manner had a suggestion of condescension. "Our climate is a help. It is never hot, and never cold—

a trifle enervating, perhaps, but all the better, if you are not driven on. Only one thing is essential: you must not think. You must learn to sit in the shade and smoke cigarettes, and be glad you are alive, like other animals. Mine is a beautiful and generous country, Señora, but in it, you must have neither memories nor ambitions. That," he added, as Michael came in, "was the trouble with Miguel. He kept thinking."

"What, I?" said Michael. "Nothing of the kind. I worked too hard."

"It is the same thing. You could not be idle. You had to ride about the cafetal until you were weary to keep yourself from saying: 'I have only this one life to lead!' But that will never do anywhere. If you must have work to keep you happy, do not come to the tropics where nature works for you. It is a place of leisure, and leisure is a perilous thing; it makes or mars a man. This is the danger of the tropics, more than the climate that you Northerners talk so much about. It is not so much how your body stands the climate, as how your soul stands leisure. I learnt, but it took me a long

time. In my youth, I had moments, when if I had taken down certain books from my shelves, if I had called up the look of the Paris boulevards, I should have cashed a draft, and shaken the dust of my home from my feet forever."

"And the people who can't cash drafts?" said Michael.

"They all solve the problem one way or another. They get content somehow, just as I did. Some of them drink, some of them grow wise, and you know," he added, "we have a good many suicides."

"Ah," said Pauline, "how painful! I don't think you paint your country as alluringly as Michael does, Don Ramon."

"Why not?" said Michael. "He only shows that down there we all have the simple aim of peace before us, and living or dead, we all get it. Otherwise we can't stay. I should be tempted to say that the suicides, too, were due to the climate."

"You would be wrong," returned the old man. "It is the monotony of life, especially for those who are not used to it, those who have lived much among men, and learnt, not how to control, but when to

distract their minds. Our life enables single ideas to take full possession—unless one has no ideas at all. That," he added, with a little instructive gesture, "is what I advocate."

Pauline sat down at the dinner-table, and the two men followed her example. She was conscious of being subjected to a scrutiny, veiled and courteous, but so searching as to render anything but the utmost frankness impossible.

"I do not think," she said, "that I indorse your definition of happiness, Don Ramon—leisure, without ideas, in a beautiful country."

"It was of content, I spoke, Mrs. Rapier. I have nothing to say of happiness. I cannot bestow it. I leave it to you."

"Are people ever content until after they have once been happy?"

"Ah," (Don Ramon was very sure) "Miguel will never be content now. Women like yourself, Señora, make men either very happy, or very much the reverse. There is nothing between the two. At present—it is quite obvious."

"And later?"

"Ah, *quien sabe!*" Don Ramon threw back his hands sharply from the wrist.

"You pay him but a poor compliment in so distrusting his choice."

"Madame," returned the old man, "you misunderstand me. I distrust you not at all. I have but to look at you, to see that you give a man a fair exchange for anything; but I distrust life. I see little happiness about me, and yet most men and women have loved. I must remember, too, that he is an element in his own happiness." He leaned forward, his elbow on the table, while his hand moved in slow emphasis. "Mrs. Rapier, his mind is sophisticated; that is an element against happiness, but his heart —that is simple; that makes for it. It is a question to me, which you will make for."

"Why," said Pauline, "I say something to his heart, you know."

"To his heart, yes. But to the simplicity of his heart. It is that I ask myself."

Michael leaned back, interested, but detached. He had brought them together that they might understand, not necessarily like each other. He held

that any third person, even himself, would only confuse the issue. He thought them wise enough to judge each other without his help.

"Madame," Don Ramon went on, "I will tell you what he once said to me: 'My friend,' he said, 'I could love only a woman so honest as to demand truth, so clever as to understand it, and so gallant as to bear it.' You are, I believe, honest, you are certainly clever, and you are besides these beautiful, but are you gallant, I ask. I am not sure. You have married a brave man. Are you brave?"

Michael, looking at her across the table, found her at the moment gallant beyond words. He knew how the question precipitated all the bitterness of their situation, and as he saw her sitting there, her chin a little raised, calm and reasonable, he felt himself shaken by love and admiration, almost painful to sustain.

After a short silence, she said:

"No, Don Ramon. I have done brave things. I can string my courage to a high pitch for an emergency. I understand the word, but I am not brave."

"I make, then," said the old gentleman, "a gen-

eral observation." General, his gesture seemed to say, as the created universe. "There is nothing so dangerous in life as to be a coward."

After dinner, Michael was called away to an interview with his sailing-master, and Pauline watched him go with something approaching dread. She was left alone with her judge. After a moment of silence, Don Ramon said:

"Tell me something, Señora. Am I ever again to see Miguel?"

She gave a little gasp. The words were so in keeping with her own thoughts that for an instant it seemed clear to her that he knew everything, and that the agony of speaking definitely of her husband's approaching death was now come upon her. But as she looked at his inquiring expression, she realized that after all he could scarcely be so calmly referring to anything so dreadful.

"I don't think I understand, Don Ramon," she answered.

"I mean," said her guest, "that he is married, married moreover to you, mi Señora. I came here this evening with the intention of asking you to

make your home, at least for part of the year, with me. I have grown to love your husband. I see myself confronted with the prospect of seeing him no more. He will not come without you, and since I have seen you, I know you will not come, certainly not more than once. I have seen the world and I understand. I do not easily imagine you at my plantation. What do you suggest for me?"

There was a pause, painfully intense.

"Will you come occasionally and visit me, even if you are not comfortable?"

"Ah!" said Pauline. She got up and walked to the window, and stood with her back turned, looking into the street. She knew she was doing the wrong thing, hurting Don Ramon, yet for the moment the pain of looking forward was more than she could bear.

He went on: "You are quite right to hesitate. I have much to offer, but you will not be comfortable. It is so hard to realize that in some countries money cannot bring the ordinary luxuries of life. I have to congratulate you, Señora, on having the fact so clearly before you. You may stand in my garden,

where gardenias grow like weeds, and camellia bushes are as high as the house, and look round at the circle of blue volcano, blue as the sky; the river comes down from one of the cones, and falls like a mist where the forest breaks off; it comes down and washes my coffee for me. Beyond, there is manzana after manzana of my dark-green coffee-trees. It is beautiful, but it is not civilization. I have lived on rice and beans for a week, and so has Miguel. We have no ice, often no meat that you could eat. We have every sort of insect that there is, not one, but thousands, and as for the servants—I am a native, I am used to it, but Miguel, he would rebel. You had better know the truth, and you are wise to hesitate."

Pauline did not turn, but she said: "Michael loved the place."

"He hated it," said Don Ramon; "hated it and its discomforts, as any man who had known better things would hate it, hated poor food and bad horses, hated getting up before sunrise to be soaked to the skin, but me, Señora, he liked. That, nevertheless, will not matter. Because he hated it, he will

never bring you there. No, nor should I advise it."

"Don Ramon," said Pauline, turning suddenly, and the old man was astonished to see that tears were in her eyes, "I promise you that if we are alive in a year, you shall see Michael. That I promise you."

He kissed her hand, and the subject was mentioned no more between them.

Later, when their guest had gone, and they were standing on the little balcony that ran outside their windows, Pauline stood silently looking out at the city.

"My pretty wife," said Michael, "you have seemed very charming in my eyes this evening."

She did not quite respond to his tone. Putting her hand on his she said, more gravely: "Why is it, Michael, that they all distrust me—these good friends of yours? Why have they only to look at me to know that they must warn me to be careful?"

"Dear woman, who knows anything worth considering about us but ourselves?"

"They do know. Don Ramon knows you. If I value his appreciation of you, I must value his opinion of your marriage. Why does it make them all so anxious? It is the same thing with Herman. They tell me I am handsome and clever, but I see them before my very eyes, conjuring up the sort of woman you ought to have married. Why isn't it I? I can, I can make you happy."

"And by a gracious miracle of Fate are now doing so."

"I do please you, I do delight you? Say I do."

He smiled at her for answer, and she went on:

"Then why have they not enough imagination to see it?"

"Why, dear girl, where is your own imagination? There are a thousand reasons. In the first place you are not commonplace, and if there is one element more than another which the world demands for a happy marriage it is the commonplace. Once get a man inside that hedge, and they feel all must be well. He will soon have no spirit left to try to get out. Then, they are not in love with you themselves, more fools they, and they are practical—

we are always practical for our friends, and I am a poor man, and you look expensive."

"It cannot be so simple. These men are not fools, Michael."

"Suppose then we say that your class is too good. You excite too highly the critical faculty. Worthless books, you know, are never so much cut up as good ones. Better men attend to these. If you refuse to be judged by commonplace standards, there is nothing left but the ideal. You make men think, and pay the penalty."

"You are very ingenious, dear."

"Be the more thankful to me, then, for I have better things to say to you than the splitting of these hairs. What difference does it make to us what they think? Am I worried because Mrs. Crewe is probably picturing you homesick and regretful? I love you, and you give me joy. What do I care whether my friends know it or not? What *do* I care?"

"But I care, Michael, because—I can never disprove it. If ten years from now I were going to be able to say: You see I was right; I was the right sort

of woman; he has been happy. But they will never be sure; I can't be sure myself. Oh, but I can, I am. I swear to you, Michael, that if we had a thousand years together, I would be the same. I should still know how to make you happy—giving you all I have. It is not the shortness of our time; it is my feeling for you. You know that, don't you?"

"Why, my darling!" said Michael, and Don Ramon might have been satisfied that the answer came most adequately from the simplicity of his heart.

CHAPTER XII

FOR those who love it the sea at night can soothe eyes and calm nerves like sleep. The schooner swam before a gentle breeze over quiet waters. Now and then a wave slapped her side and went hissing away to leeward. Michael was at the wheel, a pipe in his teeth. They had just made and left the port of Kingston, touching for their letters. Pauline was now busy with hers in the cabin.

Michael raised his face. Overhead the stars were shining in a clear sky, white mists of light and globes of fire. He was long past the point of feeling the pang indefinite when scenes like this opened before eyes which had indeed "kept watch o'er man's mortality." Rather was he conscious of gratitude that he had seen them and rejoiced. At such moments the difference between the span of his life and Pauline's seemed very little, and his the better part.

For, with him, too, the plan had succeeded. His only fear, or more accurately his only dread, had

been that in the midst of felicity death would wear a crueller aspect to his eyes. He found instead that it looked kinder; it was easy to go away satisfied. He had been right in thinking that the idea of suicide had been painful to him mainly as an acknowledgment of failure. To pay a high price for the priceless was no tragedy. To leave Pauline was sad; never to have known her would have been merciless.

Nor had he any reason to suppose that the price paid was higher than need be. Their weeks together had only shown him more plainly how largely Pauline's capacity for happiness depended on the setting of her life. If her love of herself demanded it, her love of him demanded it a thousand times more. To have lived with him in any surroundings that did not satisfy her poetic sense would have shocked her like a jewel on a dirty hand. Yet this feeling was passive, a mere negation, a renunciation. What he had not been fully prepared for was the fact that, being satisfied in externals, she became not only a more charming person, but infinitely more sensitive to charm, more capable of love.

Two bells struck. Michael looked wistfully toward the companionway. He bore her absences ill.

An instant later he heard her step, and she had flung herself against him. He put his arm about her, and then feeling the tremor of her tense body, caught her in both. She did not speak for a moment, and at last gasped:

"I want the truth, Michael."

"Not the forbidden topic."

She drew away from him. "Your health is as sound as mine," she said.

He touched her cheek lightly with one finger. "Dearest woman," he answered, "I will not be tortured on such a night, under such stars. If our supply were unlimited——"

"It is."

She had once very wisely resolved never to try this method of startling him into admissions. The attempt had always failed. Whether he leaped to your meaning, or remained in the dark, whether you surprised him or merely fulfilled his expectations, he had an irritating way of insisting that all facts should be put before him, that he should have as

much information as you. Failing this, he could remain indefinitely non-committal.

Now he looked at her, politely blank, as if unwilling to ask for light until he was quite sure he could not supply it for himself. In her heart she accused him of gaining time to meet her sudden attack.

"Unlimited time?" he said.

"As much as any other married couple."

"You have my word, Pauline, that you are wrong."

"Michael, my grandmother has betrayed you."

There was a pause. "Ah, well," he said, a slight sigh being his only tribute to the dramatic.

Pauline went on, eagerly: "You must not blame her, Michael. It has been hard for her, but she loves me so. She could not let it happen. You must not blame her."

"I should not think of doing so." A quick temper showed in the careful temperateness of his utterance.

"Your tone——"

"Oh, at least allow me the luxury of blaming my-

self. If you will consider a moment you will see I have just made rather a gigantic failure. I am in process of discovering that my knowledge of human nature does not enable me to play Fate Omnipotent," he smiled. "This is naturally a shock to any man. Perhaps," he added, "you had taught me too high a standard of feminine honor."

"Was it a breach of honor, Michael? How could she let it happen?"

"That you should see it so plainly proves me the greater bungler."

"Ah, dear bungler," she said, and held his hand to her cheek, "don't let us quarrel with the word, since we are both so glad—" She stopped on his look of steady wonder.

"*Glad?*"

"Not glad," she began, lightly, "not glad of a long future with your charming wife——"

"You imagine," he said, "that this alters my intention?"

"Dear love, do you suppose that I shall stand by and let you?"

"Good God," he burst out, "what do you take

me for? An impostor, an obtainer of you under false pretences? You married me on the understanding that I should be dead in six months——"

"But now I am rejoiced to find——"

"And you would not have married me otherwise."

"But now I am——"

"*And you would not have married me otherwise.*"

She was silent, seeking a form of contradiction that would not violate truth.

She had not thought of her task as being a difficult one when she came on deck. She had obeyed her impulse, and it had never crossed her mind that there was here work for anything but her emotions. The cleverer a woman is, the more able to make use of her mind, the more quickly she recognizes the short cut to getting what she wants offered by the emotions.

Michael went on: "It's not hard to see. You have fulfilled your part of the contract, there is no conceivable way in which I can break mine."

Indulgent to his metaphor she answered: "Oh, yes, there is. I release you."

He smiled, looking down at her for a response.

"You release me," he said. "You return me to South America, and yourself to an engagement to Hamlin, you wipe out two months, and undo our marriage? I don't know any other release possible."

"You spoke of a contract——"

"I should have said more justly that I had run up a bill—a bill for articles refused me as a free gift. You see how impossible it would be for me to refuse to settle the account. I should be a mere thief."

She was conscious of a feeling of irritation against him, as if he must indeed agree with her in his heart, and was exercising his ingenuity in tripping her with argument.

The distorted broken line of the Jamaican Mountains was falling behind them. They were headed seaward.

"I always admire your method of argument," she said, after a little, "you show such confidence that I am going to be overcome by these little logical skeletons that you advance, whereas, as a matter of fact, we both know that it is quite impossible that you should take your life against my wish."

"You seem to forget," he said, "that I am in possession of your more unbiassed judgment in the matter. Something less than a year ago you told me you could not live happily with me under exactly the same conditions that would now present themselves. I believed then, I believe much more now, that you were perfectly right. I should surely be very dull if I could not detect the pity masquerading under your wish that I should live." He paused a minute, and then added: "Do you think me ungrateful, dear woman? I know all you are offering to sacrifice, but if you'll think, you'll see how far it would be from meaning happiness to me."

"You know it is not pity."

"Have I not your word that it is? You expected me just now to be glad—your own word—that I had failed so ignominiously. *Glad*, just heaven!"

"And you would not be glad to live on with me?"

"To force you to live under conditions you once sent me away rather than undergo—wrestling with my monthly bills, in the smell of your own cooking as your grandmother so epigrammatically said? Scarcely."

"It is not like your justice to hold me accountable for my grandmother's words."

"Why, then in your own 'watching your sense of the beautiful tortured to death by the mean.' "

"You have an excellent memory."

"Where are we, Pauline? Are you attempting to repudiate the essential of our whole relation?"

"I might surely be excused for trying to repudiate an attitude that makes me your murderess."

"My murderess? my dear, foolish girl. Believe me, you take too much to yourself. I made a choice while some thousands of miles away from you——"

"I cannot imagine how you ever came to make such a choice."

"Let me help you, then. For about a year I had led the life of the tropics, with no better equipment than a Northern temperament and my love of you—the worst possible. Ah, you do not realize how much distraction lies in the rattle of streets. I had what I supposed were the compensations of nature —just what Don Ramon said; leisure to remember you, and the eternal hills to remind me of my mortality. I tried the simple expedient of work, of, we

might as well say, overwork, and the natural sequence followed. I fell ill, I almost died. And it was then, when I had, I thought, about twenty-four hours to live, that I realized my position. Money had been my stumbling-block. Oh, one does not want to be forever talking of it, but it's always there. That is a thing a man has to understand as soon as his allowance stops as a school-boy. I had been content without it until I met you, and I supposed I could be content again. It was the only thing that stood between us, and there I was dying at thirty-four, and my little capital not even put in play. There I was leaving some sixty thousand untouched dollars, and could not even get your presence for five minutes. When they told me the next day that I was out of danger, when, in other words, I simply added the element time to the situation of the day before, I made up my mind that Fate had given me a merciful chance, and put off my demise in order to give me an opportunity to have for a little while the thing I wanted. I was not going to be caught the same way twice. I knew what it was to be willing to give anything for five minutes of you. Death

seemed a small price to pay for six months. It seems smaller now that I know. I would make the same choice again, and I only ask not to be prevented from carrying it out by your relentless generosity."

"Again! Have I not told you this is not generosity?"

"Then, in Heaven's name, what is it? A good citizen's protest against suicide?"

"Michael, how incredibly dull you are—purposely, I suppose, though I don't understand you. I love you. Is it so difficult to believe that I want you to live?"

"To live as we have been living lately, certainly, but the essence of our plight is that we cannot go on living so."

"To live at any cost."

"Ah, no! Look the matter over. Last April, when your judgment was wholly uninfluenced by the outside questions that are influencing it now, you made the decision that you are now trying to reverse. Would you marry me, poor, or would you put me out of your life entirely? (The alternative was

mine, I remember.) The situation between us as far as that question is concerned is in no way changed."

"It is changed," she broke in, "it is, I feel it, if I could only think." She paused. He waited, a perfectly courteous antagonist. "Ah, yes," she caught at a straw, "here is the difference. Then you offered me the choice between poverty and leaving you, now between poverty and killing you."

"You have no moral responsibility in my death, and otherwise, I cannot see any difference for you between my being dead and my being dead to you."

She was silent a moment, and then said, tentatively: "Suppose I said I loved you better, that I was human, and having lived these weeks with you, I find I can't live without you. What would you have to say then?"

"Why, that there had been no problem then all along," Rapier answered, remorselessly. "We have been fighting windmills, if this is true. With a little more discernment we should have seen that you were as willing to marry the impecunious man of your choice as any little philistine. We might have been married a year and living in a suburban flat.

Though a trifle difficult of belief, this would make your case perfect. I should have nothing to do but curse myself for not discovering the truth sooner, but, you see, Pauline," he smiled at her, "you can't say anything of the kind."

Pauline was silent. If she had thought of deceiving her husband on this score, the certainty of failure now deterred her. She was by no means beaten. Her relation to Rapier, based, as it had always been her pride to think, on the intellect, made her no stranger to conversations of this general character. They had always gloried in unravelling by the light of pure reason the most complicated tangles of the emotions, finding here the hottest fire of excitement—the clear flame of intelligence upon the hot coals of feeling. Yet once or twice before, when the conclusion had been of importance to her, she had slipped from these high standards and made use of the strong weapon—the direct emotional appeal. The slightest touch of this weapon had been so uniformly successful with other men and women that she was always surprised that it never succeeded against Michael. This failure she

resented, the more that she suspected that had he cared to add criticism to triumph, he would have pointed out that he considered the use of the weapon at least unsportsmanlike.

Up to this point it had been her vehement feeling, scarcely her mind, that had directed her argument; but she was an intelligent woman and understood well the man she had to deal with, so now, believing that demonstrable truth lay back of her conviction, she turned her attention to exposing it.

The boat's course was altered a little. When the operation was over, a sailor forward began to play a concertina, and Michael went on: "Let me be perfectly plain on one thing. I stand dumb, more grateful than I know how to say, at your generosity in not reproaching me."

"Reproaching you for what?" Their manners were now strangely similar, two emotional creatures, vowed to the fanatical worship of self-control.

"For what!" He threw back his head. "For assuming the right to mould your destiny, and making such an egregious ass of myself."

"You mean in trusting Louisa Crewe?"

"It never presented itself to me in the light of trusting. All her own interest lay in keeping her word. Do you know the only ground on which she objected to my plan? Because, forsooth, she was afraid it might fail; either that you would guess, or that I wouldn't have the courage to do it. There is a certain element of comedy in her having contrived my undoing. She wanted to prevent me, but did not dare, she said, did not dare play with life and death, but she seems to have no misgivings about betraying me when it is too late. There's logic, there's courage for you."

She began to protest, but he cut her short.

"Yes, I know. I'm being unjust. She thought it was best, would make us happier. The truth is that in her heart she will always believe that I wantonly interfered with a life that you would have found really happy. I am in a mood to think you would have found anything better than the mess I have made of the situation."

"A mess of it?"

"To put it mildly."

"But I thought nothing was altered. Did you

not say something about the manner of your death not being essential?"

"Do you think I don't find things altered if you are to suffer, to look as you do to-night, if our six months is to be ruined——"

She drew a long breath. "At last," she said, "you admit it. We have got at the new element—my suffering. It's that that alters everything."

He was silent, awaiting the development of her point.

"You made a neat exposition a few moments ago, of how little reason I had to suffer. Well, you see that really doesn't touch the matter at all. The fact remains that I do."

"Well?" he said, almost sharply.

"As I understand it," she went on, "your plan was something like this: you said, she can't be happy with me without money; very well, here is money enough for six months; at the end of that time I commit suicide. I stop her doing a wicked thing, I make both her and myself happy, and she will never know that my death was the result of my loving that sort of woman——"

"As well blame my extravagant way of loving you. If we were different people——"

"Mere sorrow, you thought, is not unbearable, and she will have no bitterness because she will never know the truth. But you see I do know the truth, and I absolutely refuse to spend the future you suggest for me. I ask you to consider it. You know what you are to me, I am to bear not only your death, but the knowledge of my own responsibility for it—to lose you and to know I arranged it. I can't think on the moment of a prettier form of torture."

His arm was stretched out to the wheel; he bent his head on it. Pauline shivered. She had never before deliberately tortured anyone, and she had never felt more need of his support.

"Your plan," she continued, "has, in fact failed, and either way I pay the price."

She paused.

"I feel merely that I have the right to choose which one I'll pay. That's all."

A long silence followed, a silence that at its very beginning seemed to promise permanence. Pauline

found herself growing quieter to the slow rise and fall of the boat, the night-wind on her face.

The silence lasted so long that she had time to become wholly calm, to feel even the impulse to speak. Being a woman, and deeply social, she found in silence not mere neutrality, but a compelling reproach. She checked the impulse, however, remembering that she had often lost a victory by the unnecessary word.

It was Michael who spoke at last.

"You're very probably right," he said, tonelessly; "my mind doesn't seem to be very clear. The main point is, as you say, your feeling. If you feel as you suggest, naturally I don't doubt your honesty, you must, of course, be allowed to choose whichever strikes you as the lesser evil. It is the only small reparation I can make you, but I should like first——"

"My choice, of course, is——"

"One minute. I should like first to ask you do you believe I am willing to die?"

She nodded.

"You have in mind what you must bear in my living?"

She hesitated, seeking a loop-hole for negative, but finding none, again assented.

"And what that will impose on me?"

"I have it all. I choose that you shall live."

He did not shrug his shoulders, but a slight lifting of his eyebrows hinted at the gesture.

She leaned toward him, inviting his kiss. He gave it kindly, and without a trace of passion.

After this they talked on, enforcing their several points, repeating themselves. Stars that had been faint sparkles upon the eastern horizon wheeled into the full splendor of the south.

Pauline, at last urged by the love of the definite, said: "A villa, Michael, on the Adriatic, or——"

He shook his head. "The translated suburban flat? No, my dear, we'll live like this or apart. There are still chances in South America; I shall go back and have a try."

"I will go with you, Michael."

A sketch of the life there showed her her mistake. "I shall do better alone. Who knows, I may

pull something out and come back to the future of our imaginings."

Here at least was a definite hope, a solution so perfect as to be inevitable unless the Fates were lacking in all perception of the fitting. As by a flash of lightning, Pauline caught a vision of its fulfilment.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Crewe house stood in the hollow between two hills. It was a house which at once struck you as having attained in the seventy-five years of its existence that rarest beauty, the appearance of belonging to its surroundings. You could not tell whether it owed this charm to its material, which was the local stone, the same that here and there had worn through the hill-tops; or to its height, which was inconsiderable; or to the fearlessness with which its broad verandas sloped without step into the level lawns; but from whatever cause, the house had the effect of being almost as inevitable as an object of nature. On one side the land dropped down to lower meadows, but behind the house, on rising ground, a brilliant garden, radiating from a central greenhouse, half-bubble, half-mosque, presented the full slope of its radiance to the windows. Perhaps this garden, perhaps the sweep of dense shorn lawn, or the old trees, especially the oak which

for years had been thrusting its branches into the upper windows, something seemed to say that this place was, as it were, the flower, the unmarketable side of the rich fertility of the country about. The whole valley was given over to farming, and not only its wide floor, but the long slants of the hills were checkered half the year in patches of different colored crops.

Hither, one May morning, some weeks later, Pauline was returning alone. It was May; a pale sky arched over a pale green earth. The ground smelled damp and rich. The sun was hot, and the whole country seemed to steam with warmth and fertility.

"Ah, my country," said Pauline, as the train first began to twist in and out among the low hills. It seemed to promise peace, and peace she needed, now, more than consolation. Her mind and heart demanded rest as the body demands sleep. For three months she had lived so violently that she was for the time incapable of further experience. She could have asked nothing better than a continuance of this little journey. She sat soothed by the motion

of the train, alone, and yet too much in public to relax her self-control. For an hour she had ceased to exist almost as completely as if she lost consciousness. She and Michael had reached New York three days before. The yacht had made a good trip. Favoring winds had brought them home earlier than Pauline's cable had indicated. They dropped anchor off quarantine late one afternoon, and spent one last quiet night under the stars. The next day they set their feet again upon the pavements of the rumbling city. Three days were left before Michael's steamer sailed. They crept ashore like criminals, determined to have these three days to themselves.

To this end Michael had taken rooms in a great uptown hotel, well-filled and well-kept, but as unknown to them and their friends as if it had been set in a foreign land.

Here Pauline spent the happiest days of her life. All the weight of horror was lifted. In comparison the pain of separation was endurable. The contrast was almost as great as if immortality had suddenly been bestowed upon him, so startling was

the lifting of the shadow of death. To let him go for a length of time, unknown, but finite, was bearable, and she was able to sink a bearable future in a radiant present.

For Michael the situation was not so simple. With spirit, but with knowledge, he looked forward and saw little chance for success, success as Pauline would reckon it. He wondered whether, as a matter of fact, the concentrated pain of his death would not have left her a happier woman than years of disappointment, this dragging separation, and finally, perhaps, some miserable makeshift of a common life, thrust upon them. He still thought approvingly of the finished neatness of his own solution. That, at least, had settled the matter completely, and now it was all at sixes and sevens, still a problem, still a struggle, still in all probability there were regrets and failures ahead.

Yet to a man, young and absorbingly in love, life, even with dreary complications, is still a gift, and it was a gift which for these three days Michael made full use of.

He took her to her train and there they parted.

It is happier to be the first to go—not to see a raised gangway and a little vessel slipping away. They parted almost in silence, with no protestations, except their embrace and Pauline's tears, yet feeling, nevertheless, that nothing had remained unsaid between them.

Mrs. Crewe met her at the station on her arrival. In the old lady's greeting, which was tender in the extreme, there was a barely evident tinge of anxiety. She would have explained it as caused by her knowledge that the state of being in love is so thoroughly irrational that she was prepared for almost any folly of opinion on Pauline's part. How could she tell how far Michael's influence might have led the girl away from the clear common-sense to which she had been brought up? She would not be surprised, she said to herself, if Pauline had allowed herself to be persuaded that it was contemptible to break such a promise as her grandmother had ignorantly made to Rapier. Fortunately, Pauline, supposing that Mrs. Crewe had been influenced singly by a wish to make her happy, felt only gratitude. She was not, however, in possession of the

processes that had led to her grandmother's breach of faith.

Mrs. Crewe had been conscious from the moment that Rapier divulged his plan, even, perhaps, while he was in the act of divulging it, that a widow is as free as a maiden, that romance is a dangerous disease that it is just as well to have, and have done with, that she herself had not been able to arrange her own life in a really sensible and satisfactory way, until after she had loved and lost her first husband. To delay a plan, she told herself, was not to abandon it, and she prophesied in her own mind, that if Michael were allowed to carry out his plan of action, Pauline would be Mrs. Hamlin within five years.

The old lady had had a great deal of time for thought, and the more she thought, the more passionately did she desire Pauline's marriage to Archie. She desired this not only on selfish grounds, though to have Pauline settled within a few miles of her, to put away forever that gnawing self-reproach at her own treatment of her granddaughter's finances, these were notable rewards.

Nevertheless, her most potent reason for insisting on this solution was her belief that it ought most perfectly to attain Pauline's happiness. Now to find ourselves in possession of definite reasons, some of them selfish, for desiring a man's death, and also of the power to prevent it, seems, if we permit it, not very far from taking his life. To Mrs. Crewe the difference between the two seemed so little that she felt that circumstances would soon make her a murderess if she allowed them to have their way. The more she approved of Michael's suicide, the less she felt she could allow it to take place. Her promise, it must be added, weighed with her not at all. She had always regarded promises as things to be kept at her own discretion. So after some weeks of perturbation she chose what she considered the high-minded course. She wrote and told Pauline the truth.

The consequence was that the carriage had been in motion several minutes before she said, more formally than she intended:

"I was sorry to get your letter, saying that Michael could not come with you."

"His steamer sails to-day."

"Is he too angry to care to see me?" Her tone betrayed how mistaken in her opinion such an attitude would be.

"He is not angry," Pauline smiled. "I don't think he would commend your notion of keeping a promise."

"My dear, I had to use my own judgment in such a matter. How dull clever men are. I saw the idea never crossed Michael's mind that it was impossible to keep a promise like that."

"But not impossible to make it," said Pauline, gently. Only absence made her Michael's ally on this point. At heart she was Mrs. Crewe's pupil. "You see, in your place, he would have kept it."

"He would have been a very wicked person, and a poor friend to all parties," returned Mrs. Crewe, ending the discussion with relief.

"You know, my dear," the old lady went on, presently, "there has been a great deal of talk—a great deal of shrugging and smiling at the artistic temperament. Your Aunt Minnie comes over three

times a week to try to make up her mind what is the truth."

"And you tell her?"

"Oh, nothing. It's not necessary. I couldn't tell her anything that would satisfy her two theories that Michael is the least dependable of men, and so must have deserted you, and that you are the most attractive of women, and so cannot have been deserted."

Pauline smiled. The carriage drew up before the door. Both ladies felt that the meeting had gone well.

The younger now sprang out, without waiting for the assistance of the footman, who was engaged in pulling down through its full half-circle the worn nickel handle of the bell. The front door was of an old-fashioned type, of heavy panelled wood, but its formidable appearance was somewhat relieved by narrow little windows on each side, made of small squares of red, blue, and purple glass, through which one could peep and get a parti-colored view of the hall within.

This hall was large and bare, and had been in no

particular modernized. The floor was paved in black and white marble of a pattern which now survives only in the imitative oil-cloth. Round the hall opened a number of doors, wider and lower than single doors are made nowadays, the carving about their frames taking the place of decoration. Between two of these hung an enormous mirror in a whitish gilt frame, and gave back a pale green reflection. Between another pair there was an engraving of the Republican Court, and there was no other furnishing but two chairs, suggestive of a Gothic cathedral, a large polished table, and here and there on white pedestals marble busts representing the forefathers of the Crewe family. The stairs, which in the days when black walnut was admired had been stained in imitation of that wood, ran round a wide well, through which the blue light of the zenith fell from a skylight above. The banisters were broad, and ended in a high-fluted newel-post, on which stood an old-fashioned, and to tell the truth, hideous lamp.

Pauline went swiftly up the stairs, and on the second story opened the door of her own room—

the room that had been hers ever since she could remember. It was fresh and perfect as everything with which she had to do. The walls were blue, the windows looked toward the south, over the garden, and the sun streamed in on her writing-table near the window. Book-shelves were fitted in every available space, and the effect was that almost of mosaic; for there were no sets—no Thackeray, Dickens, and Scott. Whatever plan had been followed in their arrangement, it had no regard for outward appearance. Buff color and emerald, ruby, gold, azure, and chocolate, thick and thin, were crowded together.

Twice since she could remember the room had been completely changed to keep pace with its occupant. When Pauline first remembered it, there was on the walls a paper representing nursery characters—Jack and Jill together went up the hill, and Mistress Mary watered her garden.

Then when she put away childish things her grandmother had let her choose a new paper. It was covered with formal globular roses; and there

had been a chintz to match on the *chaise longue.* Even now a pink-fluted cup and saucer on the mantel-piece was a remnant of this period. She remembered how she had coveted it thirstily for several weeks before it had been given to her.

At this time—she was about twelve—she had first begun to write down the verses which she composed. The rose-papered walls had shut in, in those days, a great deal of clandestine creation—clandestine, not because she feared reproof, but because the act was too intimate and delightful to be shared by others. Long after she was supposed to be in bed and asleep, she would be kneeling at her window looking out at the garden, while thoughts swinging along on metrical wings, visited her and made her shiver with the intoxicating impersonal conviction of genius, and then, alas, always proved themselves delusions, even as they took form, losing thereby the essence of the divine. She wrote many a couplet to the garden, and one longer effusion that hymned it at spring-dawn, at summer-noon, at twilight in autumn, and at winter midnight. She remembered having been particularly pleased with

what she had considered the originality and completeness of this conception, and had actually shed tears over the sad commonplace of the result. In funny old account-books and diaries (stationers' advertisements) these early productions had been recorded.

Many of the books on the shelves were milestones. From fairy-stories in engaging covers, through those poets that are the special property of immaturity, to finally the great majority of the books on which she now rested.

The room stood, in her estimation, for all that part of mental experience, which, even in the least reserved among us, can go on only when we are absolutely alone—experiences which are not thought, for thought may be shared, but rather a sort of prolonged steeping in our own opinions, forming, it seems to me, the very groundwork of individuality.

Nothing was greatly changed in the room since she had occupied it the preceding summer. Nevertheless, her quick eye noted many irregularities. She moved about, straightening pictures, reuniting

strayed volumes—the little alterations that each week's cleaning had always entailed.

She was amused to see among the silver things on her dressing-table (which must have been sent up by her maid from the town-house) a photograph of Archie. She took it up, looked at it, and set it down again with a shudder that the kind, stubborn features scarcely deserved. Her shudder was one of terror, not of distaste. The latter she would never feel again; they were too far apart. Three months of feeling, an abyss of reality, separated them. She shuddered only at remembering how near she had once come to slipping over the edge.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. WYETH, as was to be expected, did not let the grass grow under her feet. Pauline, who was not anxious to subject herself to the explorations of her kinswoman, was not sorry to miss her first visit. Her second one, however, was more successful. Mrs. Crewe had gone out, and Pauline, under a huge pongee umbrella, was lagging placidly along the main path of the garden when she suddenly looked up, to perceive Mrs. Wyeth approaching her alone.

The day was warm, and Mrs. Wyeth had never achieved a very satisfactory solution of the summer garb. Her clothes were always tight and severe, and to-day, instead of giving the effect of being lighter, they seemed merely more meagre than usual. Her black gloves slightly constrained the position of her thumbs, her gray and white skirts fell in about her heels, yet, none the less, as she came briskly along the path, her sleek, black hair shining where the sun struck it, she gave by force of sheer vitality a cheerful, invigorating impression.

When she came near enough for the gesture to be effective, she shook her finger.

"You wicked creature," she said, "to give us all the slip."

Pauline kissed her. "Sit down, Aunt Minnie," she returned, "under the elm here. This is where Louisa and I sit every morning. We pretend we are examining the condition of the flower-beds, but as an actual fact," Pauline was with some art endeavoring to divert her aunt's manifest curiosity into unobjectionable channels, "as a matter of fact I am telling her travellers' tales—legends and adventures of the Caribbean, for all the world like Columbus at the Court of Isabella." She stopped, struck by the aptness of her own simile, for had she not found a new world, and yet returned in chains. The pause was fatal. Mrs. Wyeth had time to assume a serious manner, and to ask formally after "Your husband."

"Michael? Oh, very well, thank you. He must be just about rounding Cape Maisi. The strangest place, Aunt Minnie—steep gray and green steps into a sapphire sea——"

Mrs. Wyeth leaned over and put her hand on Pauline's.

"I thought, my dear, you might be glad of a little talk with an older woman."

Pauline shook the hand warmly and returned it to its owner.

"I am always glad of a talk with you, Aunt Minnie," she replied, lightly.

The other settled back on the garden-bench.

"You see, I feel that much as we love your grandmother, her views on matrimony are not quite—" Mrs. Wyeth paused and pursed her lips. "Marriage is a serious thing, Pauline."

"A bagatelle, Aunt Minnie, compared to falling in love."

Mrs. Wyeth was harder to derail than a more intelligent person. She comprehended only one idea at a time, and she cared nothing for a pretty argument. The apple which Pauline here threw in her path offered her no temptation; the opportunity for a discussion had no charms.

"Ah, you may be cynical," she returned, for she had rather missed the point of her niece's remark,

but would not have answered any remark not in the line of her own train of thought, "but you are behaving foolishly. I'm older than you, and I repeat foolishly. Don't think I don't understand how you feel, but you should have realized that marriage isn't all romance as novels are always trying to pretend. Why, I had not been married a week myself, before I came back to my mother and asked to stay. It wasn't that I did not appreciate your uncle, Pauline, who was a most remarkable man, but it all seemed strange, and I was a great deal alone, and in fact just like you, I preferred my own home, but my mother was a woman of sense. She said at once: 'Minnie, you would be married, now you are married, stay married.' And you ought to try, Pauline. Of course I know with an attractive woman like you, it must be hard to settle down, and I know that though your husband may be, is, I mean, a genius, he isn't exactly—in fact, you miss the way your grandmother always spoiled you. Well, I could have told you that the one essential of married life is kindness—that the man should be kind, I mean."

Pauline's lips curved. She saw a delicious paragraph for her letter to Michael—he, the tenderest of men.

"I gather, I think, that you do not consider my husband kind," she said.

"Oh, he means to be, I'm sure. I'm sure he means to be, but, of course, a man never understands a woman as another woman does." (Pauline opened her mouth to speak and shut it again, hopelessly.) "If you insist on the truth, I have always felt a lack in his manner to you of that self-abasement, that looking to you as his good angel—and I always say, if a man hasn't that before marriage, what will he be after? However, it is too late to comment on such things now. I reproach myself very much that I did not point it out to you before. Now you are his wife. A wife's duty is to be with her husband."

"I did not know it began to be a duty until it had ceased to be a pleasure," said Pauline, gently, and added, hastily, with a flash of genius, "And where is Sylvia, Aunt Minnie?"

"Oh, Sylvia. Humph," said Mrs. Wyeth, disapprobation, embarrassment, and a suggestion of com-

plaisance mingling in her expression, "I don't at all approve of Sylvia's conduct—not that it is her fault, poor child; I suppose at her age it's natural, still—she's lunching with Mr. Hamlin and his sister."

Pauline was confused. She had always considered her aunt as Archie's warmest adherent.

"Isn't that a very safe and pleasant place for her to be lunching?" she asked.

"Pleasant, I have no doubt. I'm not so sure of its being safe. My dear Pauline," Mrs. Wyeth added, in a burst, "he is at our house every day on some pretext or another. The more I try to stop him, the more he comes."

"Well, that sounds natural," Pauline murmured, with a smile.

"What wouldn't be unnatural would be if Sylvia should imagine he wanted to be taken seriously, although I say to her ten times a day: Now I ask you, Sylvia Wyeth, do you think it likely that a man who was in love with Pauline will ever find much to interest him in you? That's exactly what I say."

"Really, Aunt Minnie, he was not in love——"

"Oh, fiddledeedee, my dear, of course he was. He just notices Sylvia out of pique. It's all as clear as day to me. I say it to Sylvia again and again—pique, nothing but pique. I wish," she went on, with a sharp nod, "you would just give him a hint that —of course I know he means to be kind, but he might put ideas in the child's head. It would not come very well from me, but you might just say—in short, I do not want him dangling about. Have you seen him?"

Pauline replied that as yet she had not.

Having heard Mrs. Crewe's account of Archie's attitude toward her marriage, she had been a little surprised that he had not earlier come to see her, in order to talk it over with her. As day after day went by, and he did not come, she began to fear that her grandmother was mistaken and that he was more resentful than he appeared. She now saw with some hilarity that he had been merely otherwise occupied. Far from trying to nerve himself to the interview—had probably written it daily on his calendar, and each day allowed the wish to see Sylvia to interfere.

"He said something," Mrs. Wyeth remarked, "about bringing Sylvia over here to meet me, after lunch, but I don't suppose he will choose to see you first before us."

But this, it subsequently appeared, was exactly what he did choose. Pauline and Mrs. Wyeth were still sitting under the elm, when there was a sound of wheels, and Sylvia and Hamlin came round the corner of the house. As they approached, Pauline looked eagerly at the girl, in her pretty muslin and broad-brimmed beflowered hat, and saw that she had lost nothing of her early charm. She was as typically virginal as ever, only there was now more confidence in her bearing; she seemed to be treading surer ground. There was now no little hesitation before she spoke as there had been in old times, as if she needed an instant to summon sufficient resolution to venture on so conspicuous an undertaking; now and then she even met your eye as she addressed you.

She went so far as to make a little mild fun of Archie, who was so delighted as almost to take away the point of it.

"We should have been here earlier," she said, folding her hands demurely on the crook of her parasol, "only Mr. Hamlin was unable to decide which of the horses would be most benefited by the three miles."

Archie grinned. Pauline laughed outright.

"We are fortunate," she said, "that he was able to come to a decision at all."

"He wasn't," Sylvia was still gentle. "The groom sent round the trap without asking him."

"We must be off," said Mrs. Wyeth, rising with a little too much haste. "Good-by, Pauline. Good-by, Mr. Hamlin. What is that? Dinner to-night? No, you may not. There is not enough in the house for you to eat. You don't eat very much? You won't eat anything at all in my house to-night, begging your pardon. Twice in one week is enough. By and by you can come as often as you like. Sylvia is going away, and I shall be lonely."

When they were gone, Archie seated himself beside Pauline where Mrs. Wyeth had been sitting.

"And now," he said, rubbing his hands together, "I want you to tell me all about it. I want to know

a number of things. I have thought of you so much. First of all, I want to know what sort of a man Mr. Rapier is—a pretty good sort, I suppose, or you would not have been so positive. Well, you know, it did look rather reckless to an outsider. Mrs. Crewe told me you had not known him very long, and that he had been away a year, and he might have changed completely, or you might have, in that time. Still, I was very much taken with him. I liked his looks."

"Oh, dear me," said Pauline, "how shall I describe him? He is, I think, best explained by a friend of his, who says he is at once the simplest and most sophisticated man in the world. His simplicity concerns himself, there, he is almost crude, he knows so exactly what he wants and why he wants it, and how he means to get it, and what is worthy for a man to do, and what beneath him. His sophistication is all taken up in understanding exactly why other people are so different. Add to that that he is an artist and that there are whole areas of him that no one ever gets at at all, and you will have some idea of him."

Archie nodded. "He struck me as being very determined," he said, wistfully.

"He's that."

"I wish I were," replied Archie, with an egotism so frank as to be almost engaging. He sighed and after a moment went on, with a manner suggestive of apology:

"Pauline, I've been afraid you would think, if Mrs. Crewe told you—did Mrs. Crewe tell you about a conversation we had just after your wedding?"

"Yes," said Pauline, gravely, although in her grandmother's hands the incident had been deliciously comic.

"I was afraid you would think," Archie went on, looking at her earnestly, "that I had never been quite honest with you, that I knew I did not care as much as I said I did. But I give you my word, I give you my word of honor that I never doubted for an instant—at least—well, if I had, seriously, I mean, I would have told you. It was a terrible surprise to me to find how well I bore your leaving me, a terrible surprise!"

"Your honesty, dear Archie. I never doubted it for a second. No. I was wise enough to see that you merely succumbed to my method. It was your obstinacy—you know you are obstinate—that was engaged, not your affection."

He smiled consciously. "You understand too well," he shook his head in flattering wonder.

"Now don't tell me," said Pauline, "that I have made you more incredulous of your capacity for love. That would indeed be an injury."

He showed some confusion, and then overcoming it, said smiling:

"Your cousin thinks people love only once."

"Of course, but one is free to choose which time one will count."

"I think so, too—that it only happens once, I mean."

"Well, then," said Pauline, "I was not your 'once.' "

"No," returned Archie, gravely.

In the pause that followed, Pauline decided that it was as good an opportunity as any to deliver Mrs. Wyeth's message.

"By the way, Archie, I am commissioned by Mrs. Wyeth to give you a hint; but after one of her own hints anything but a plain statement would fall flat. She doesn't want you 'dangling about.' "

Hamlin looked as if he were going to be very reserved.

"Mrs. Wyeth used to like me."

"And does still. She thinks, nevertheless, that you may 'put ideas into her daughter's head.' "

"What sort of ideas?"

"That you like her very much."

"I do."

"Oh, then, that you love her."

"I do."

Pauline was silent. If this were true, no one interested in them need have the least further anxiety. Their way was clear, not the smallest obstacle stood between them, and this train of thought brought her with a pang to her own conduct.

"You are thinking," said Archie, "why I have not said so, and cleared up the whole thing. Just because it is so perfect as it is. I am so happy, and so, I think, is she. I don't want anything to change."

"Things seldom remain exactly the same. Sylvia is going away to-morrow for two weeks."

Archie actually jumped.

"To-morrow! She told me nothing about it."

"She has a fine sense of duty. Her mother's object was probably quite plain to her."

He got up. "I must see her before she goes. Ask her to dinner to-night, Pauline, and I will come in afterward—" He stopped, for Pauline was shaking her head determinedly.

"I will do no such thing. I am fond of Sylvia, and, frankly, I don't trust you. Oh, not your intentions, Archie, but the result. Why was this little accident of her going away necessary to your decision?"

"Not to my decision. I had made up my mind some time ago. I did not speak because I was content with things as they were, but if she is going away, I sha'n't be content at all. After all, Pauline, you must see that in such an important matter, I would not be influenced wholly by such a little thing as her going away for two weeks."

"But would not you? Did you not propose to me

the first time because you ought to have been in Chicago, and the second, because I refused you the first?"

Archie considered. "Not entirely," he said. "Besides, it was a very different matter with you. It was, how shall I say—on a different level; a different side of me, the side that always wants to 'win out.' No one could feel like that about Sylvia. I love her with the better part of my nature; the part, I hope, that will never change."

"And I, if I understand right, appealed to the part that changed twenty times a day, and I changed quicker."

"You understood me too well."

"And Sylvia?"

"Does not understand me at all—at least not my moods and such things. She does not allow for them, and so I have them less. It is a great deal better like that, the best thing in the world."

Pauline smiled, remembering how she had once found him restful for the same reason.

"It is the best thing, perhaps, next to being really understood."

Archie looked as if this were not likely to happen to him in this world, seemed to think it sadly over for an instant, and then said, cheerfully:

"Well, are you persuaded?"

"I should be more fully persuaded if you would wait patiently until she comes back, until there are no obstacles to excite you falsely, and then speak."

"I will do exactly as you say. Good-by." He held out his hand, and after he had taken hers, kept it a moment, as he said, apologetically: "You are not hurt, are you Pauline? You don't think it queer of me to be sure—so quickly?"

"My dear man, I think nothing except that Sylvia is a person worthy to be very happy, and I think, I really think, that with care you can make her so."

She watched him as he walked away.

She perceived that not all men are made to pay the penalties of their weaknesses.

CHAPTER XV

"MICHAEL, there never was so lovely a place as this in May. Louisa and I breakfast out of doors, she sits facing the roses and I the elm-tree. When I first came back it showed the merest yellow featheriness, and now it is a fountain of gray-green. To-night we have been walking an hour or more on the piazza. The wistaria is heavily in flower. You never knew such cones of fragrance. The moon was high, and here and there a pane in the dome of the greenhouse shone like the sea. On such nights I can almost return to the follies of my childhood, and believe water-nymphs are rising from the river, and the spirit of true romance walking in the garden. And when I think that it is I who am keeping us apart! Oh, my dear love, if you are unhappy, if you are even inclined to be vindictive, know that you are perfectly revenged. I suffer horribly in your absence. Yet to the perfection of this pain you would, but for the laxity of Louisa Crewe's principles, have condemned me forever. And yet I am not unhappy

as we feared, but content for the moment. Is this because I have been so nourished that I cannot starve, I have had you so thoroughly that, want you as I may, I cannot need? And that you should be alive, and I your property, sets my present so far above my past, how can I complain? Besides, I have lived in such agitation of late that I scarcely ask more disturbing interests than the crocuses on the terrace and the violets under the hill; scarcely, my dear sir, so very disturbing an interest as I fear you will always remain.

"Louisa receives me most generously, not throwing my folly in my teeth, but merely assuming that now being married I can agree more entertainingly with her own light-minded views on matrimony. She speaks of you with affection, much as if I had, against her advice, adopted a small boy, a nice boy, a boy we were both fond of, but one who in common with his kind could hardly fail to be a care to me. She finds me, I believe, a pleasant companion, and what is something of a comfort to me, does not distrust my good spirits, because she knows no reason why I should not be happy—a little sentimental

vaporing under the moon she would perhaps allow me, but what have I parted from? Only a husband, after all, and at that, one to whom habit had not as yet attached me.

"Yet most infinitely do I prefer her belief in the utter unimportance of marriage to most people's view of it as the great romance-killer. Why, if people are content to pity parted lovers, must they smile so slyly at the separation of husband and wife, however necessitated a look it may wear, or if they sympathize, it is but at the breaking of a domestic usage, more than atoned for by the comic hint of liberty. Even Lucinda Lafrere picks up a book from my table and cries: 'Oh, a naughty book. Is this the way you take advantage of Mr. Rapier's absence?' What was I to answer? That your absence had no such advantages? I really see no reason why the fact that I have married you lays me under obligations to discuss my relation to you with anyone who comments on it. I ended rather lamely with: 'I have not constituted Michael the censor of my reading.'

" 'He probably so regards himself,' she answered.

'I have been married three years, and Billy is still forbidding me to read books I knew by heart before I was twelve.' Good Heavens, what have I done to you? Are you henceforward to be considered sunk to the level of Billy Converse, by the mere fact of being a husband?"

The completeness with which she expressed herself to Michael was one element that enabled her to live a satisfactory life with her grandmother, for she was quite right in supposing that the old lady was content; and saw nothing incredible in their common happiness. There is no incitement of self-control so strong as the knowledge that any evidence of emotion will be misinterpreted. Pauline did not dare relax for an instant the ready good-nature of her bearing, knowing that Mrs. Crewe would see in the first suggestion of depression, not sorrow for an absent man, but the expected evidence of regret for an ill-considered marriage. On the other hand, of course, the old lady smiled in secret with some complaisance over her granddaughter's content, thinking that it was better, after all, to give young people their heads. Then they found that these es-

sentials to their happiness were quite as pleasing at a distance, and so settled down more quietly.

Tyranny is not more dangerous to the tyrant than scepticism to the sceptic. Mrs. Crewe, expecting Pauline's confidence on all points, believed that her own keenest wisdom was shown in her ability to doubt, her right to disbelieve. It is so much easier to disbelieve than to understand. Here lies a barrier between youth and age. If youth does not understand its elders, it is perforce spurred to effort. If the case is reversed, age escapes with a tolerant smile at affectation or self-deception. This is especially true of the relation of the older generation to those whom it has brought up. They will believe no characteristic genuine that does not bear the hallmark of their own tuition. They would doubt anyone's holding such views in sincerity, but that their own pupil should do so is manifestly ridiculous; or if not ridiculous, then insulting, ungrateful for all the care expended on instruction. Alas, a confidant may disapprove, but must not disbelieve. This is the advantage of our contemporaries. They are willing to accept us at the point of development which

we have reached; they bring no tainting recollection that we were thieves at two, and admirers of Adelaide Anne Procter at fifteen.

Pauline, as a matter of fact, had been at home for several weeks before she came back to the full bitterness of separation. She had betaken of peace, and now she needed it no more. She wanted Michael —the man she belonged to. Most clearly in quiet hours, she saw herself held as in a vice by the consequences of being the sort of woman she had allowed herself to become. She longed to be either slave or free; to have the courage to go to him, or the calmness to stay at home; to find her happiness simply as other women did; to be, in short, all the things he had never reproached her for lacking.

She was ashamed of her discontent. She had told him that she could wait years, and here, at the end of a month, she was nearly at the limit of her powers of endurance. Whenever she was able to find a respite for her own suffering, the thought of what he was enduring tortured her the more; he a man young, and a lover, exiled with no other alleviations than those his own indomitable spirit afforded him.

How much or how little these might be, his letters did not tell her.

Only now to make matters worse, he began to urge her to count less surely upon an immediate future. He filled page after page with details, setting before her the exact situation, the possibilities of coffee-production, the fact that fortunes were made no more quickly, without capital, in South America than anywhere else. The uselessness of his exposition was shown by her attitude to it. She had no wish to face the truth. She found his details dreary and unimportant. Nothing but their association with his handwriting carried her through them at all.

"You speak," he wrote, "as if this separation were a peace-offering to Fate, a sort of voluntary sacrifice that of itself will bring us our reward. Dear love, I may be away years, and we be no nearer. I do not think it will be so, but anyone else would say it was most likely. Money is not easy to make. More than hard work is required. I cannot bear to think that already you are dwelling on my return, and that each letter is a disappointment as you read it through and find I make no mention of

having discovered a gold mine. Dear girl, wake up! I am never going to do any such thing. It is a pleasant dream, but let us have reality and fit our lives to it. If, while we are still young, I return with money enough to make you happy, it would be almost a miracle. Cease to look at every letter as a herald of my return. On the other hand, remember that every bit of me is working for this and this only—to be with you again in honor. I desire nothing else."

To this she replied:

"Oh, never write me such a letter again. Let me have this imitation of happiness—a hope that grows more certain. I try to look upon this time as I used to on the hour of twilight that had to elapse on Christmas morning between waking and a voyage of discovery to my stocking. If I overrate your chances of success, it is the instinct of self-preservation. Tell me rather what success, if it came, would mean—that I should see you in a year, in five, in ten? I have tried not to write like this, but I must have something definite to hope for, about which even to be disappointed. Dearest, if I have been worse than useless to you in the time of conflict, you

shall see how lavishly I can reward the victor. Oh, Michael, how could you ever think of death, when in life there is possibility of such a return as yours shall be."

Sylvia was gone longer than two weeks, but Archie kept his word. He stayed quietly where he was and waited. Now and then he appeared at the gray house, and though he was careful not to mention his lady-love's name, the perfect calm of his manner and the absence of any further desire to discuss his psychological state were in themselves the most explicit confidence.

It was July before Sylvia returned. Pauline was not much surprised when the next day Mrs. Wyeth's coachman drove over with a note requesting Pauline's immediate attendance.

She was taken at once to Mrs. Wyeth's bedroom. The shades were drawn down and flapped now and again in the morning breeze. A faint odor of *eau de cologne* pervaded the air. Mrs. Wyeth was lying down, nursing a nervous headache, but on seeing Pauline, jumped up, shut the door, and said, with a gesture: "What do you think has happened?"

"I think that Archie has told you that he wants to marry Sylvia."

"My dear, you evidently suspected. You should have given me a hint. I never thought of such a thing. I was never more surprised in my life. He came here yesterday and wanted to see her. She was tired and I would not let her be disturbed, so then he asked for me. I could not imagine what he wanted, it took him such a time to bring it out, but finally he said, in that quiet way of his: 'Why do you dislike me so?' I said plainly I did not dislike him, and then he asked why I was so opposed to him as a son-in-law. I shall never forget my surprise when he said that word. You can bear witness that such an idea had never crossed my mind. I always supposed that you had broken the man's heart. Oh, this neuralgia! Pauline, my dear, tell me honestly, as a friend, is it possible that he cares for the child, really? I knew you would know, if anyone does."

"I can see no reason to doubt it, Aunt Minnie. He certainly was not in love with me, and this you know began before he ever saw me."

"What do you mean? When he was first staying here I saw nothing of the kind. Still, as you say, that was before he saw you. Afterward he had eyes for no one else. That is what puzzles me. How can a man love Sylvia when he has once loved you? She is a dear good child, but——"

"How fortunate for him that he does. It is not our own faults that come so high as the faults of the people we love, and Sylvia has no faults. Enviable Archie!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Wyeth, who had as usual detached herself from a sentence that she did not immediately agree with, "I shall not let them be married for a long time—she is so young—a year at least."

"Why must they wait, Aunt Minnie? Happiness is so rare, and youth not long, and waiting a wearing, aging thing."

"Waiting, Pauline, how strange! Don't you know that being engaged is the happiest time of your life."

"What rank cynicism, happier to wait than to have? Never, unless you are waiting for a disap-

pointment, and this won't be that. Let them be married."

"I am surprised to hear *you* say so," returned Mrs. Wyeth. Pauline was looking out of the window, and from behind the shelter of one of the shades did not answer.

Before she left she had gone far toward persuading her aunt that there was nothing to keep the lovers apart. It took some time. She was hurrying across the hall when she met Sylvia. The girl had just come in from riding with Hamlin. She had on a linen habit of colorless gray that brought out all the more the delicate blondness of her skin. Her beauty was striking. She seemed illuminated, exalted. Pauline held out her hands, and Sylvia slid into her arms. "Oh, Sylvia, I am so glad," she said. Sylvia, her head on her cousin's shoulder, was whispering:

"What do you do, Pauline, when you are so happy? I am getting to be good for nothing. I settle to nothing. The thought of it all won't let me. I don't eat, and as for sleeping, I never sleep. I keep waking up to remember. And yet," she added,

smiling, "I am none the worse for it. But it is not right to be so foolish, is it? What shall I do? What did you do?"

"I don't know, Sylvia, I was never as happy as that."

She kissed the girl and they walked hand in hand across the hall.

On the drive home, Pauline was conscious of nothing but a vague anguish, the realization of the wearing, aging work she had cut out for herself.

Mrs. Crewe behaved admirably on the announcement of the engagement, of which she had, of course, suspected the probability. She wrote an excellent note of congratulations to her old friend Hamlin, and met Mrs. Wyeth's loquacity with real interest.

Archie and Sylvia were almost ideal lovers. Sylvia went about looking like an angel; as lovely, and almost as far removed from earth. She was quite willing to give up all her time to her mother, and would sit for an hour at a time listening to Mrs. Wyeth's explanation of trousseau and ceremony; only her docility was of little avail, when it subse-

quently appeared, as it always did, that she had not heard one single word. Gentleness and vague assent were not what Mrs. Wyeth craved, and so it happened that most of the arrangements for the wedding were decided at the gray house. Pauline knew well that it was bitter to Mrs. Crewe to see Sylvia about to become the possessor of all that she had envied for her granddaughter.

To Pauline, too, the situation held its bitterness. It was not easy to live in contemplation of a love whose way was so smoothed before it, which was about to be so simply and happily fulfilled. Perhaps it was not very creditable, but the sight of their happiness made her the more lonely. She thought of going away, but found that she had not the spirits to wish to see outsiders. She preferred to stay where she knew the hours of the mails, and could always control a messenger to the post-office.

Toward the middle of July, Crisp, who had been abroad, returned and telegraphed that he was coming out to dinner. He stood in the door-way, huge and conciliatory, like a lion who would like to make friends.

"Well," he said, "so you were a real, live, flesh-and-blood woman, after all. And Mike was right, and you dared to do it."

"I am so glad to see you, Herman," she said, taking one of his large hands in both of hers and pressing it, "so very, very glad."

Crisp permitted the caress, while he continued: "Who would have thought it? I didn't, I was quite wrong. So first he marries you and then he goes away to make you a fortune. There is something pleasantly imprudent in that. I tell you what it is, Pauline, you're a good girl, and I'll give you a wedding-present that I want myself—a sketch of Michael, and I never made a better."

"Send it to me at once—to-morrow."

He smiled at her tone. "You don't get much sympathy from your grandmother, I suppose. No, you wouldn't, although she might see. You must have had fun, you two. You were amusing, I have no doubt, devilishly amusing; and that's a great deal to say of lovers. Talked well, both of you, probably. We'll dine together often when he comes back. When is he coming?"

"He does not know."

"Or are you going to join him?"

"No."

"Humph," said Crisp. "The trail of the serpent. Something of the same old Pauline, I see. Well, I should go if I were a woman; more especially his wife."

"He doesn't want me to."

"My good woman, do you want me to believe that if you set off to-morrow and arrived, whenever you ought to arrive, in his strange residence, he wouldn't be glad——"

"Don't, Herman. Have you no reserves? You can't possibly understand; it is just that I am his wife and he is coming to me, and I have the courage and patience to wait for him."

Herman threw his head back and looked at the ceiling, saying, after a moment: "Patience and pleasant house in the country."

"Oh, Herman, Herman!"

"He has courage and patience, too. But has he anything else?"

It was fortunate, perhaps, for both, that at this

moment Mrs. Crewe entered the room. She had the late mail in her hand, and Pauline's eyes detected the lilac stamp that marked the weekly event of her life.

Crisp and Mrs. Crewe fell into conversation. He had met some old friends of hers in France and was giving her an account of them, when he suddenly interrupted himself to say:

"Hello, Pauline, you seem to have good news."

"To think that my countenance should be so unreserved. Yes, I have, Herman. Michael thinks he may be able to get away for a short time next month." For all her calm manner her hand shook and the simple sentence seemed to sing like a bird.

Crisp gave a short roar of pleasure. "Good," he said; "I shall have good talk again. Never was there such a man at an argument; such inspiriting conflicts as we used to have. My mental muscle grows soft at his absence. Now I depend on you, Pauline, not to let him slip through your fingers again. He must stay."

A little later she saw her guest depart, with more satisfaction than she had watched his arrival. She

wanted to be alone. The sound of the wheels had not died away on the gravel before she was in her own room. Her letter said:

"My darling, a wonderful thing has happened. Having played your game your own way you have won it. I have not found a gold mine. Nothing is due to my own ability. In the most casual way, yesterday, Don Ramon told me that he had made me to all intents and purposes his heir. This means, Pauline, that some day you will be very rich. I am afraid that, after all, I am somewhat that thing you despise—a husband; for not even the prospect of seeing you before long is so important as the knowledge that now at last, thank God, your future is assured.

"Don Ramon tells me he has always had this in mind, even when he first, without having seen me, used to urge me to come down; and has smiled at my unconsciousness. In view of this you will not be surprised, and I hope not annoyed, that I told him the whole story of our situation. It was, I thought, the least I could do to let him know how incredibly felicitous was his announcement. On hearing what

we had been through he advised me to return to you and try and make up to you for it, to, in fact, make my home in the North. This I refused to do. In the first place, he likes to have me with him. In the second, though he does not say so, the thought that his estate may be less well managed after his death, distresses him. You might spend your life over coffee and yet not understand it. Therefore, as I am determined to be a competent manager, I will miss none of the knowledge I can get from him. The best gratitude I can show him is my interest in the business. I see no reason, though, why I should not do myself the infinite kindness of spending a month with you. At present I cannot get away; the season is not a healthy one and we are short-handed; it is not the time for the next in succession to turn his back. But, in September, if all goes well, I can get away.

"Be happy, dear, because we are to meet soon, and eventually you are going to have every single thing your dear, foolish heart desires. Do you feel as keenly as I do that this is not exactly the way in which I should choose fortune should come to us?

I should like to know I had done this with my own two hands.

"Tell this to your grandmother, to whom it will be as great a comfort as it is to me. Also oblige me by just once snapping your fingers at the goblin poverty."

CHAPTER XVI

AUGUST went by in dusty sunshine. It was very hot yet, still Pauline would not go away. Here, as well as anywhere, a happy woman could eat up the time before she saw again the man she loved. The zest of life had returned; she could play with the happy, and look in the eyes of those who valued the same things she did.

For the first time in her life she dared to look forward. She scarcely realized until it was removed how heavy a burden of apprehension had lain upon her since her childhood. Not since she had gone into long dresses had she been able to say lightly, like others, ten years from now, when I am thirty, when I am forty. The words had caused a sinking of the heart, the remembrance that she did not know in what situation the next day would find her. When the poignant difficulties of all her relation with Michael had obscured this every-day anxiety it was none the less tugging at her skirts.

She had been used to think that care had taken

away the best part of her girlhood, but now she found it had been saved for her. Her spirit sprang up; she grew younger and, like a child, able to enjoy the smallest happenings of the day.

"I am ashamed," she would say to Mrs. Crewe, "to be such a different person. To have the thing I call my nature so changed because I am to spend a month with another human being and afterward never to starve."

The first week in September went by without bringing a letter from Michael. Such an omission was without precedent. The idea occurred to Pauline, and was expressed by Mrs. Crewe, that a cable might have miscarried and Michael be now on his way home. When, however, the second week passed, Pauline wrote to the agents of the steamship company to ask if their boats had been in any way delayed. Their answer was prompt. Their steamers, they said, stopped for the mail only. On account of yellow fever they were not allowed to carry passengers from the port. They expected mail the next day.

The next morning Mrs. Crewe came down to

breakfast to find herself alone in the dining-room. Her eye fell on a letter at Pauline's plate. The stamp was familiar, the writing new. She lifted it, feeling for her glasses; the post-mark, too, was well known. After a silence of two weeks a stranger was writing to Pauline. She heard a step on the stairs and put the letter in her pocket.

She saw that from the very threshold Pauline's eyes had taken in the table; that she had sought and failed to find, and readjusted herself before she even entered the room. Mrs. Crewe had grown to know that arrow-like look, the instant of blankness, and quick rallying to be again a social creature. Worse than silence was her obviously inadequate, "No letter from Michael?" as if her crushed look had need of such a comment.

The ladies did not take long over breakfast. They soon pushed back their chairs. Pauline took up the morning paper, and Mrs. Crewe stepped out on the piazza and read:

"Mrs. Michael Rapier,

"Dear Madam: It is with the greatest regret that

I write to inform you of the death of your husband on the 22d of August. You are probably aware that for the first time in ten years we have been visited by an epidemic of yellow fever. Two weeks ago the first case appeared among the workmen on the plantation. Soon afterward Don Ramon Heredia was taken ill and died. Your husband never left his side during the few hours he lived, and after his death took complete charge of the sick. These were much more numerous than the well, and your husband worked day and night. He was taken ill on the night of the twentieth, and died on the second day, scarcely recovering consciousness. I enclose the address of Don Ramon's lawyer, with whom your husband's lawyers should at once communicate, as by Don Ramon's will Mr. Rapier died possessed of his entire estate.

"I hope I shall not appear intrusive in expressing the admiration we have all felt for Mr. Rapier's courage and endurance. I remain,

"Respectfully yours,

"JOHN GREGSON."

Mrs. Crewe, looking in through the dining-room window, saw Pauline, with arms fully outstretched, studying the morning paper for news of a South American boat.